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A WAYWARD WOMAN



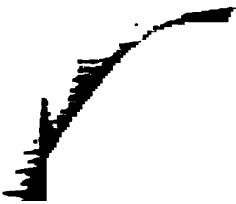
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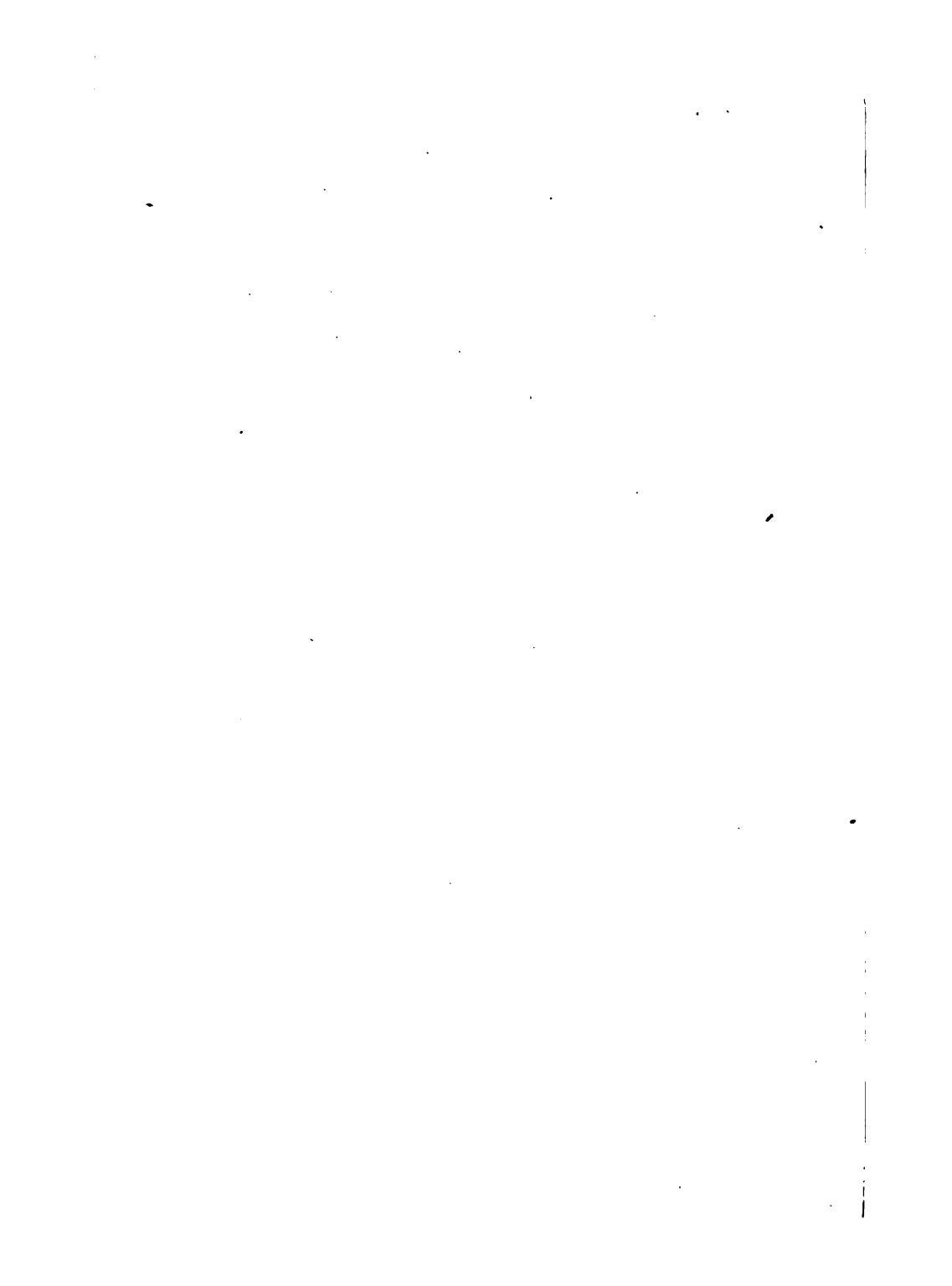




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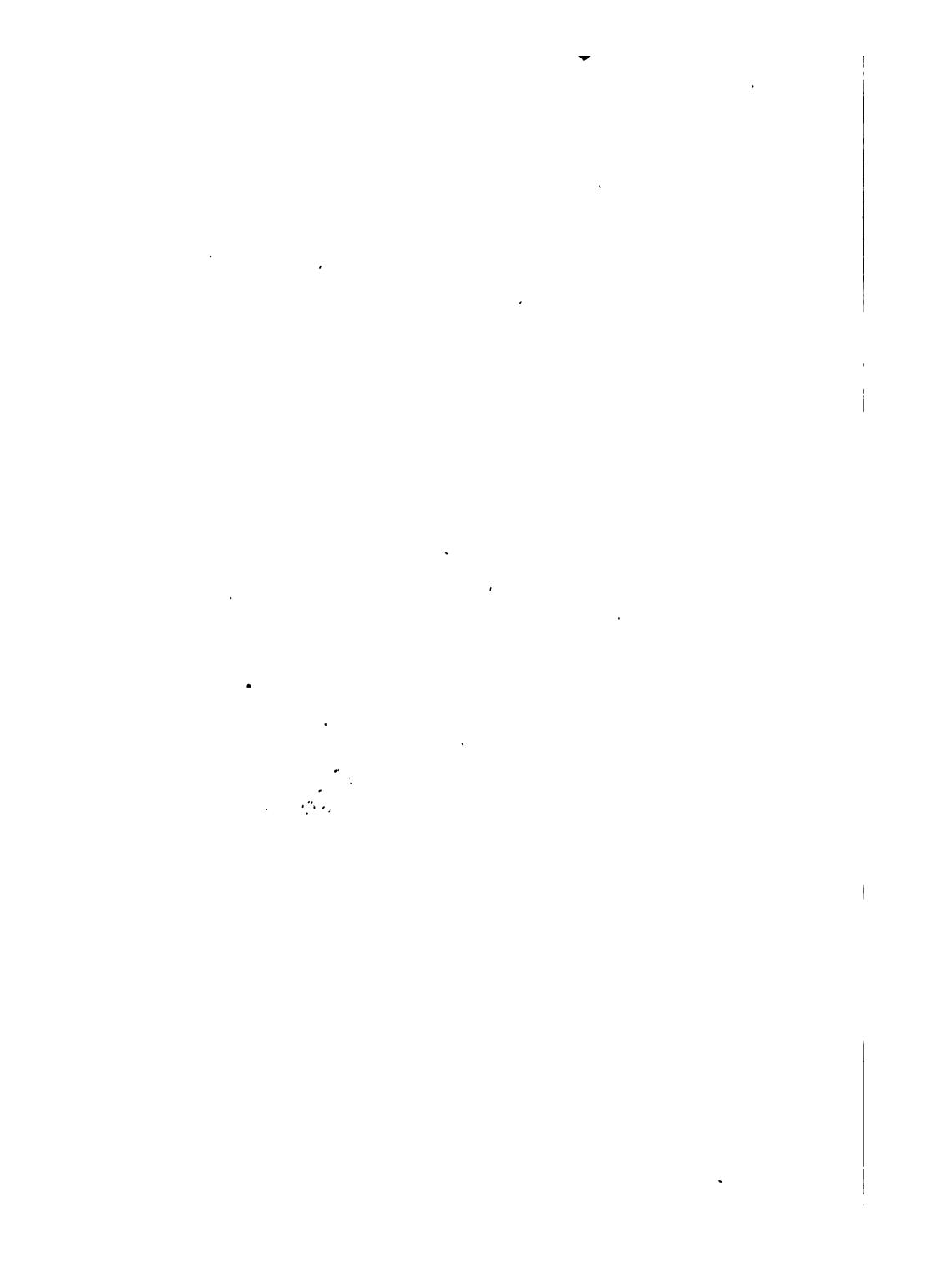






A WAYWARD WOMAN

THIRD VOLUME



A WAYWARD WOMAN

BY

ARTHUR GRIFFITHS

AUTHOR OF 'LOLA' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1879

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251. f. 486.



A WAYWARD WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

Two years have passed since their marriage, and Dominic and his wife are together in the studio of their home in the far west of London. They are discussing plans, turning over portfolios and the pages of his note-books.

‘You shall be called the poet-painter, Nick Gwynne,’ said Winnifred. ‘Here’s language!’ and in spite of his efforts to take the book from her hands, she read aloud :—

“‘Gwynne’s Seasons, described and illustrated by the Author.’ That’s mine, now for yours.

“‘December 17th. It’s a cold cheerless wintry day ; no sunshine, no lustre in earth or

sky ! The tone of colour everywhere reserved and dull ; grey is the prevailing tint, pure and pearly in passages, but the parts farthest in shadow deepen almost to black. Yet there is life and action in the picture, as if in vigorous protest against the rawness of the air and the keen knife-edge of the breeze. The fast-speeding gusts tear off crest after crest of the yellow chopping waves ; there are barges running down stream, with wind and tide in their favour, while a hard-pressed steam-tug battles up in the teeth of both dragging behind it a lengthy line of deep-laden lighters. The sea birds are swifter than ever upon the wing ; everything that flies—ropes, rags of sail, flags, cordage, sand—all these are at the mercy of the fierce eddying blast. The river itself, under the biting lash of the wind, flows faster and faster as though in full flight, seeking in noisy terror to escape and hide its troubled face in the broad bosom of the sea."

‘ “ Not an unpleasing subject.”

‘ I should think not, indeed,’ interjected

Winnifred. ‘“ Not an unpleasing subject. It speaks of energy and movement, of sturdy active resistance to harassing thoughts and bitter memories. What though the sky be bleak, air chill, and breezes hostile ? They may be battled against and beaten ; and so may the hard buffets of the world, its indifference, its cold neglect, and every cruel blow.”

‘ When did you write that ? ’ Winnifred asked.

‘ After Pallanza.’

‘ Well ; it’s out of date. But you must paint it.’

‘ All right, some day’ said Dominic the dilatory.

‘ No, at once ; you have studies, I have seen them. But don’t interrupt. I’ve not done. Here’s another and a better winter’s scene.

‘“ January 23rd. The night has been bitterly cold, and the dawn broke upon an icy motionless world. The sun was just lifting its big red disc to peer above the frost

fog which still lay thick upon the surface of the river. It had neither heart nor strength to fight with the frost, but sprang as it were hurriedly into the sky, hating it all the while as do effeminate people their shower baths, or the streets when the thermometer is low, and seeming to long for the day to be done that it might again set and sink into its warm tropical bed. Haze hid half the landscape, and in its perplexing veil objects took a new and more weird aspect, or were altogether lost. Thus the far-off bank of the river had disappeared, and with it the square tower of the little church that crowned its slope. Very near was the seeming distance : not a hundred yards to those dim ghost-like scaffoldings, those piles of timbers intertwined and twisted with countless arms thrust forth like gallows raised for wholesale executions ; quite close the old dredging machine which lay far out in the stream raising its quaint unfamiliar form, and in shape like the shadowy skeleton of some strange amphibious monster fixed there these ages past. Close up under the

eye lying like lazy caymans, or idle alligators sleeping on the shining slime, were gathered lines of lighters, boats too, open and decked, and a half-rotting boom that stretched across the creek ; the water was smooth as glass ; it might have been a sheet of pure glare ice ; stillness reigned supreme ; the reflections were motionless and perfect.

‘ ‘ It is like death this scene : hushed, inanimate, stone cold is this mysterious haze, like the curtain of the grave hiding within its bosom secrets unfathomable.” ’

Winnifred read on :—

‘ ‘ March 20th. The other evening when the sun was going down on a day that has given the lie to the proverbial bitterness of March—a day drawn in advance upon summer to be repaid fourfold by icy winds in June—I was out in my punt, and found they had brought into the creek an old hulk to be broken up. As she lay there amid the snags and sharp points of the old timbers which half impede the navigation, her form rose in such giant outlines above the water-line, that

the topmost crest of the old egg-shaped beacon barely reached her bows. The colour of this old warrior was iron-grey : the grizzled white of one whose battles were fought when we were babes in arms. Time too had left its mark in the long furrows like wrinkles, which corroding rain had eaten into her sides, and in the rivulets of red rust that had run from the rotten ironwork as tears might flow from bleared and sightless eyes. The ship's lines sweep grandly from stem to stern, and fall into composition with the streaks of the cirrus sky tinged now with the opal glow of sunset. This old man-of-war, though here dethroned and in inglorious retirement, was yet in aspect every inch a king ; lording it over the small fry of boats and barges that came about her with the native dignity due to age, high rank, and a long life blazoned by great deeds. But is not this crumbling rapidly decaying ruin an emblem of the fate that must overtake us and all our works ? Even as this wooden warrior, which went forth a century ago in the heyday of vigorous

strength to fight, win victories and add to the national fame, is doomed already to destruction and death, so also must every work of man's succumb to inevitable decay. It is but a question of time. No monuments can endure though they be built on foundations more secure than granite, in metal more lasting than brass. Babylon has perished ; Nineveh is no more. Beauty fades faster than the sun-gleam upon an April landscape ; fame is shattered by the historian's research ; canvases rot ; frescoes fade ; mosaics fall to bits ; the noblest edifices must crumble, totter, and fall ; for everything the day is short-lived ; one little hour of triumph, then comes the knife and all is at an end.

“ “ Why should we labour on ; why strive and struggle ; why fight with failure ; why brace oneself to higher effort after one small success ? Dust we were : to dust we must return.”

‘ That won’t do, Dominic ; that belongs to the “ Lotos Eater ” period : we want more cheerfulness now. Here, this is better :—

“ March 19, 187—” (a year or two later).
Dominic, your courage is beginning to improve.’

‘ I had begun to forget you, Winnifred,
and your scandalous ill usage.’

‘ Silence. I like this.

‘ Truly there is a lesson to be learnt from March, and those rough wholesome winds that tear the clouds to tatters and scatter the shreds in giant handfuls across the sky. Up above these flying fragments, whereof the shapes are rapidly transformed as it might be to evade pursuit, the pure white cirrus clouds range in quiet ranks, moving only in slow and stately progress, as majestic spirits high withdrawn living in close communion with the tranquil unalterable blue. But down below the burly is at its height; the trees wave their branches in lusty glee, the breeze rattles over the sprouting grass, and stirs every blade with the desire to grow. All around the scene is full of coming life. A new world is on the brink of birth: the thrushes in cheery carols prepare to woo

their brides ; the green buds, blushing *débutantes*, modest yet strong in the conviction that they are as pure as they are beautiful and young, are bursting forth upon every branch.

“ This bracing spring wind is like champagne, like a tonic, a soul-stirring, invigorating draught brimful of sturdy life. It dries up the soddened ground long soaked by sorrowful weeping showers as brave words of encouragement dispel the tears from the despondent cheek. Ought it not to awaken us also to newer and stronger efforts ; to give us fresh courage; to bid us hope on ? ”—Which you did ; with the most satisfactory results.’

‘ That’s as may be ; I hoped for the best. I wonder whether I’ve got it.’

Winnifred looked at him with a comical smile.

‘ As if you would dare to doubt it.’

‘ I sometimes doubt whether it is all real ; whether it can last ; whether there won’t be a sudden crack and snap, and you will be whirled away far into space. Winnifred, tell me. Are you happy ? Are you satisfied ? You

do not regret ever so little all you have sacrificed for me ?'

' Dominic, never let me hear you speak like this again. I am not demonstrative ; you must know that, by this time ; I do not wear my heart upon my sleeve. I cannot make an open confession of faith ; all I feel cannot be expressed in simple words.'

She bent over him with brimming eyes and kissed him on the brow.

' My good brave husband, to have gained your great love I would have made the same sacrifices a thousand thousand times.'

But this temporary concession to sentiment was a weakness to which Winnifred would not willingly yield for long. She recovered herself almost directly, and with some scorn in her voice cried :

' This is no time for billing and cooing. Business is business, and the pot must be boiled. Old Christison says he must have three pictures within as many months ; and that will leave you but a bare half year for your Academy picture. Come on ; let us

finish these notes. What do you say to a series of the Seasons ? Winter ; one of those settled on will do for Winter. A spring subject called March Winds. Now all you want is Summer and Autumn.

‘ Here is something about autumn :—

“ Autumn has come at length, and we are another step onward upon the long and weary road ; another milestone will soon be left behind : they come faster, they are closer together, as the years run on and we approach our journey’s end. A sad and sorrowful season, truly, for those who will still look back to mourn over opportunities lost, energies misapplied, hopes too easily encouraged faded now into nothingness, and never to be recalled ; yet not without its lesson to those who can read its teachings aright. As in spring there is tender promise, so in autumn gold there is plentiful fulfilment, complete fruition and possession. Yet more : this rapidly decaying spell of the dying year contains within it the germ of future life. Look at the fallen leaves, and take heart

from their example. Their short day is nearly ended : they are cut off now, as useless, from the parent stem ; yet see how merrily they dance together in joyous troops, impelled by the vagabond eddies of the fitful October gales. They are determined to die hard as they have lived ; they will not give up the ghost without a struggle. Already the bright hopefulness of spring-tide has blossomed into the ripe fulness of summer, and with autumn has come the dropping sickness that preludes death. Yet round and round, in many a winding maze, they whirl fast on the wing, as flight of southward bound swallows, weaving new measures with careless uncalculating step, altogether reckless of the death that is so near at hand.

“ They are doomed to die, ah ! how soon. Yet after death there is life. To grim winter once more in ceaseless procession, succeeds the green and robust young spring : these withered leaves will live yet again in their descendants the buds. May we not also, even in the hour of darkest disappointment, when

regrets gnaw at the heart-strings, and failure pinches us tight—may we not, if we choose, distinguish down in the far-off vista of the time to come a dim glimmer of light? If we had but the fortitude to look on, ahead, away, and on to the uttermost verge of things! Let us but rake out the ashes, light new fires, in our stone-cold hearts. The bright blaze of success to the tenacious is never absolutely denied."

‘ That will do for Autumn. It is a capital *motif* for a picture : strong contrast of colour, dark stems, blood-red leaves, purple distances, and the strong sunset hues of this peculiar time.

‘ Now for Summer :—

‘ “ July. A thunderstorm. Mark how patiently, with what submissive silence, Nature awaits her chastisement. There is for a moment a solemn pause ; all the world stands still. The leaves droop, flowers hang their heads, not a ripple stirs the surface of the ponds ; beneath the hedgerows the cattle are huddled together motionless, the dog seeks his lair, the birds nestle for safety in among

the topmost boughs, and dare not give voice to song. Presently, with rushing whirlwind force, the tempest crashes down, the trees wave their branches in bitter entreaty, and from the surface of the storm-lashed pools are scattered a bitter rain of despairing tears. Then the black clouds dash at each other like warriors in the fight, the thunder rattles from their clashing shields, lightning flashes from the shock of the foemen's steel, torrents flow from the gaping wounds in the sky.

“ Yet the earth, though sorely vexed, endures its grim trial with a gladsome heart. The punishment is but fleeting, the good permanent that follows. She submits with quiet courage to the temporary pain, as brave souls in agony face the surgeon's knife ; she knows there is restoration and new life in drenching showers and searching blast. By-and-by, when the worst is over, one general jubilee bursts forth under the brightening sky ; the birds on every branch are loud in hymns of praise, the whole landscape laughs in sober contented joy.”

‘ I want something sultry ; a real summer picture from the sunny South. Yes, a conventional Italian subject—why not ? You need not treat it according to rule ; you have enough originality, I suppose, not to copy Rowbotham or Collingwood Smith ? This now pictorially rendered :—

‘ “ August 2nd. I am standing in the bed of a dry white water-course ; dry but for a thin stream trickling now inaudibly and often invisibly amidst the tremendous boulders, which its surging floods in winter toss to and fro, like foam flakes ; looking over a clump of hardy chestnuts, aquatic plants for half the year, living now upon the scant sustenance of stony ground. Down below the lake sleeps, but is visited with happy dreams which suddenly change its aspect and its colour ; now it is emerald green, next azure, again the deepest purple under the shadow of the slow flitting clouds. These clouds come up from behind the opposite hills rising slowly pile upon pile, great columns of solid white vapour released like the genius of the oriental

tale from his iron prison, and then stream off in the direction of the wind, uncurling themselves as they go rolling out and straightening their massive coils as if rejoicing in the ample space of the boundless ether wherein to disport themselves at will. It would be intolerably hot but for a soft air which now and again *effleure's* the landscape and tempers the glowing rays of the mid-day sun. The reeds upon the bank, and the tall canes with their spiky spears rattle together or wave gracefully forward in gentle entreaty to woo the breeze. Anon it dies away, then freshens into a merry moving wind twinkling among the round leaves of the poplars, turning back the silver-grey points of the mountain-ash, and streaking the aspens with a sudden tremor as though they had been caught in the crime of being absolutely still. The breezy movement is repeated by the glancing butterflies lemon-yellow and red, and by the single snow-white sail which is hastening to its moorings upon the sandy shore.”

And so in desultory talk the morning crept slowly on. They spent many mornings thus, always together in partnership, as it were, either discussing plans or working side by side. Sometimes as now, Dominic was in doubt, needing counsel, advice, encouragement, and found them readily from his wife. When the passion of work was on him, Winnifred left him to busy herself in household cares, to visit the nursery and the kitchen, returning only again and again to mark progress, to reply when called upon for an opinion, to give countenance and support at every turn. If a fractious child was model for the nonce, and positively refused to be still, Winnifred charmed it with a lullaby composed for her own babes ; she assisted to costume the lay figure, and had already a wardrobe which, if all trades failed, would have started her well upon the transpontine stage. Often at her husband's express wish she flatted in backgrounds or worked on a corner of drapery in any picture which was in hand ; still more often she set a palette for herself and sat

down to spend hours contentedly at her easel, prosecuting the art, in which she was rapidly attaining considerable skill.

She was absolutely happy, and had been throughout these two first years of her married life. It would have been strange if she had been otherwise. There were substantial reasons for her happiness. In the constant companionship with Dominic she found an ever-growing charm; she discovered new virtues in him day by day: he was gentle, considerate, affectionate beyond measure; he never wearied of showing his gratitude and devotion. She loved him for his very faults: his sensitiveness, his occasional fits of absence and abstraction, his over-nice fastidiousness and dissatisfaction with his own productions, which made him a somewhat slow workman and prevented any rapid accession of wealth. What matter? He should follow the bent of his own genius, and work his own way slowly or not at all according as he was in the humour. Such talents as his were not to be forced. What if he turned out only a tenth

part of what other prolific painters gave the world? It made his work all the more valuable, the more highly prized. Grist came in sufficient quantities to the mill. Since the first great success of the 'Lotos Eaters' everything he touched turned at once into gold. The dealers came down and swept his studio clean. They took every scrap, every idea hastily jotted down. Already was he promised three or four deep to Christison, who came manfully forward with an open purse and bid Dominic only put in his hand. Mr. Gwynne might have whatever money he pleased to draw; he might draw upon the bank as easily as he could upon the canvas or the wood.

This liberality was pleasant enough. Winnifred was too inexperienced, Dominic too unbusiness-like, to see behind it any particular snare. It relieved all pressure too in the household; with so prompt and free-handed a paymaster there could be no pressing pecuniary needs. Now and again as to day Winnifred did her best to rouse her husband to fulfil his engagements, with

greater or less success ; but she did so being anxious for his fame, and that he should keep himself prominently before the world, not because she feared that the alternative of unproductiveness might land him some day into perplexing difficulties, perhaps leave him bound hand and foot a slave in some task-master's power.

And just as she had no special forebodings for the future, so was she troubled by no very poignant regrets at what had passed. Her conscience now and again upbraided her for her perfidy to Mr. Crammersh ; but when thus assailed, she stoutly repudiated all blame, and passed it on to those who had led her into the scrape. Did Mr. Crammersh still bear her ill-will ? She had no means of knowing. He had threatened and stormed, and played the part of one furiously aggrieved ; but such loud talk seldom came to much. What harm could he do her ? and at least he had consoled himself without much loss of time. Within the same year he had married Lady Adeline

Goldhawk, who had administered gladly enough to the legacy left her by Winnifred's defection. The house in Portland Place, with its splendid fittings, the establishment mounted regardless of cost, were suitable properties to support the part of a duke's daughter married to a *nouveau riche*. Winnifred did not grudge them to her, nor did she herself miss them one bit ; she was perfectly contented and satisfied with her own quiet and unpretending home, although it lay according to fashionable notions quite at the other end of the world.

This other end of the world was not three miles from the Marble Arch, yet to people 'in society' so called, it might have been situated in the unexplored districts near the equator or round the poles. It went by the name of Pedlar's Green. An old-fashioned suburb which somehow had been long forgotten or overlooked by those who led the march of London development. While other neighbourhoods miles more remote had been rapidly built over, their green fields and

blossoming lanes giving place to snug villas, streets of stucco and wildernesses of bricks, Pedlar's Green had remained nearly fallow, as if no speculator dared to invest in its freehold and copyhold lands. Country it remained for long, country as pure and simple as is consistent with close proximity to a multitudinous capital town. It was given over to the brickmakers, who destroyed its picturesqueness by their rude gear, their mills and 'hacks,' and bundles of dissipated straw, honeycombing its surface with deep pits and cuttings sunk in search of suitable 'dirt,' flooding large areas with liquid chalk, or smearing them with a plaster of coal dust, or nauseating the sense of smell to all who came within reach of the sickly odours from the smouldering 'clamps,' wherein slowly and with much smoke the green bricks were transmuted into good hard 'stocks' fit for the London trade.

The dust contractors also had looked upon Pedlar's Green from time immemorial as their own private domain, shooting here perpetually

their cartloads of rubbish, raising thus such giant heaps that whole armies of raggmuffins found constant work in sifting the ashes, and, searching for treasure-trove, reaped nondescript harvests: chance leaves of dismantled blue books, a fragment of Salviati glass, red tins, once filled with Ramornie beef, jam pots and pickle jars in thousands; more rarely silver or gold; sometimes only an occasional piece of electro-plate or a copper coin of Queen Victoria's reign. Sportsmen came to Pedlar's Green to shoot pigeon matches, as though it was a deserted spot or so sparsely inhabited that its wild natives could scarcely be injured by stray shot; yet again came tramps and semi-civilised gipsies to encamp upon its scraps of wayside grass; living upon wheels or under ragged diminutive tents, and turning out their live stock—donkeys, children, borrowed poultry, all to trespass and batten where they pleased.

Such as these—brickmakers, dustmen, nomads of every kind—saw with a pang the great town stretching out its tentacles and

drawing Pedlar's Green into its grasp. But the absorption was inevitable, and it had commenced a year or two before Dominic and his wife had come to settle therein. Already it was cut up and parcelled out; new roads were fenced off, the parish authorities had laid down the needful drains, enterprising builders had begun to run up ginger-bread edifices in the style they loved. Here stood up singly a slender house of several storeys, like those in a box of toys, very bare and uncomfortable, yearning, perhaps, for a companion to share its loneliness. There a low two-storeyed terrace ran like a fast-growing creeper rapidly over the ground. All styles of architecture were to be seen side by side; each builder followed his own caprice, leaving his work plain even to baldness, or adopting florid external ornament as a means of concealing internal defect. All sorts of conventional titles met the eye at every corner. Alpha Lodges and Beta Halls, Florence Houses, Alfred Places, and Jemima Rows; Bellevues looking into back

alleys, Park Crescents with not a tree in sight. Shops kept by struggling tradesmen, driven to the suburbs by the monopoly of larger establishments and the prosperity of co-operative stores, maintained a frantic competition with one another. For spiritual needs two new churches of opposite views had been built by far-seeing curates, who felt convinced the parish would rapidly prosper and extend ; at night a perfect illumination of red lamps secured the natives of Pedlar's Green prompt attention to their bodily ills.

No doubt the suburb was now making giant strides—it was fast becoming cockneyfied ; the home of city workers who trudged or travelled citywards morning after morning in tall hats and conventional frocks, and carrying black bags, in which, perhaps, to store the gold and silver they picked up there. But there were among them many wealthy and well-to-do, whom the cheapness of land had attracted to Pedlar's Green, and who there built themselves villas with glass-houses and coach-houses, and having some pretensions

as to taste and size. Again, there had been, and still was, much to recommend Pedlar's Green to painters in general, and to Dominic in particular. Its atmosphere was purer far than in the heart of the town ; it escaped happily the Cimmerian darkness of November fogs, and white light is as precious to the painter as air to everyone else ; a garden in parts still free from the trespasses of the builder was possible, and with it a lighter and more commodious studio than any in a street, as well as the smell of flowers and the songs of the birds. There were not a few of the art world, therefore, who had long for choice made Pedlar's Green their home, and lived in hope that they might be suffered long to enjoy it in peace. But the place had still stronger claims on Dominic's regard. It was associated with those early days of boyhood when with his beloved mother he had come to London to devote himself to the study of art. Here the good lady, country bred, found some solace for the Kentish village, which nothing but Dominic's

welfare would have tempted her to leave ; the lad himself was glad to find meadows handy, and trees to sketch whenever he could snatch time from the weary round of bread-winning in those early struggling days.

So now when he came to settle down in London for good and all, his thoughts had reverted naturally to his first London home. With Winnifred he had explored the old suburb, already curiously changed. They had hunted hopefully high and low amid the brand new township ; but both husband and wife had turned disdainfully from the hideous monstrosities the builders and house agents considered the very thing to suit them, and were on the point of seeking elsewhere when chance brought them near an old farm-house, the last, perhaps, of its race, standing sad and neglected, as if its days were nearly numbered, and the old order must soon give place to the new.

A quaint rather dilapidated edifice, which would need much patching and repairing, and yet a very suitable home for Dominic

and his wife, Winnifred Gwynne. It was a little off the main road, having a short private avenue of its own, although part of its length was margined by streets of villas spick and span, their staring whitewash and shining glass throwing into stronger contrast the venerable brickwork of 'The Farm.' It stood half ivy-covered, amidst a few chestnut and decrepit mulberry trees, which bent in curious curved contortions their gnarled old trunks like weird arms to protect their old friend from the dangerous intrusion of pretentious newcomers. Behind was an ample garden crammed full of fruit trees—apples and pears and peaches, with rose bushes growing in thick profusion, with clumps of hollyhock, here and there a clipped yew tree or a hedge of box.

Beyond, a small duck pond, and a narrow streamlet over which a rustic bridge led to the nearly dismantled farm buildings with their black timbers and acres of red-tiled roofs ; beyond these again, green fields and an horizon of trees, so that even an imagina-

tion not over-exuberant might have fancied the spot a hundred miles from town in the very heart of the shires.

Here the Gwynnes set up their tents. Their means were scarcely affluent, but they had money enough to settle themselves comfortably, to mount their establishment sufficiently and in excellent taste. Already while abroad, with an eye to future furnishing, they had ransacked many old shops in many old towns, and had made a fair collection of properties at very moderate cost. Foreign stuffs too, and bits of rococo furniture, old brasses, stray scraps of china, wonderful carved frames, and fragments of stamped leather and old oak. To all these they had added on their return many treasures picked up in frequent patient pilgrimages through Wardour Street and other places of its kind. The dealers soon knew Mrs. Gwynne, and prepared to show her the best of all they had got. She was keen at a bargain, but appreciative under Dominic's intelligent tuition, and did not haggle long. So they became

possessed of Chippendale chairs, of Jacobean sideboards and bookshelves, of one or two Turkey carpets part worn, of some strips of tapestry and yards of old-fashioned brocades and richly wrought silken stuffs. They got for a mere song a nearly complete dinner service of old blue, and picked up a lot of delicious china, cracked and mended perhaps, but always of good colour and admirable from a decorative point of view.

With such materials at hand it was not strange that the Gwynnes soon transformed 'The Farm.' The house was delightful inside and out, a perfectly pretty picturesque place.

Neither husband nor wife spared time or trouble to further its arrangement and its internal decorations. Winnifred was a skilful needle-woman, on occasion pains-taking and industrious. Most artistic was the work that came from her hand ; the window hangings in the drawing-room were her doing, a gorgeous piece of art needle-work, which might have been sold for a fancy sum ; hers the portière in the outer hall, the

drapery in the studio, the antimacassars and 'tidies' upon the sofa and chairs, the doyleys on the dinner-table. As for Dominic, he was perpetually at work, enriching with quaint device, mediæval figures, fairy story, mythological legends, sprays of beautiful flowers and leaves, every inch of space upon walls, windows, shutter, and doors. At infinite pains he had completed a ceiling of peacocks' tails in the drawing-room, and a frieze of petunias and peacocks on a dead gold ground; he had decorated the panels of the sideboard, the chimney-piece, the book-cases, portions even of the floor. 'The Farm' was, in truth, as much worked up as if it were an Academy canvas, and might have been sold out and out as an original 'Gwynne.'

And here, enjoying much solid happiness, all in all to each other, blessed by two small mites of children, both boys, and surrounded also by a small *coterie* of cheerful congenial friends, our story once more takes up Dominic and Winnifred Gwynne.

CHAPTER II.

FOR quite a year after the marriage there had been a coolness amounting to a complete rupture of diplomatic relations between Winnifred and her former home. Her wilfulness, her obstinate opposition to his wishes, had annoyed her father beyond measure, and Colonel Forsyth had declared that nothing would induce him to speak to his daughter again. He posed as the most injured of parents ; as one who had sacrificed all, and received in return only ingratitude of the blackest dye. But she had made her bed, she must lie upon it; the Gwynnes need look for no help from him, even should they come, as he predicted with that irresistible tendency to anticipate the worst, to the workhouse and abject want.

Lady Clementina, as in duty bound,

followed her husband's views ; but having no blood relationship with Winnifred, she was at liberty to let her animosity go to greater lengths. Not that our direst enemies are not sometimes very nearly related to us : a man often has not to travel beyond his own family circle to encounter depreciation, misconstruction, enmity, abuse. But Lady Clementina had never been very affectionately disposed towards her stepdaughter. Winnifred was no doubt partly to blame for this ; as we know, her attitude towards her father's second wife had been marked always by scornful indifference, often by open mutinous defiance amounting almost to positive dislike.

No overtures, therefore, might be expected from Brook Street, nor for a long time could Winnifred bring herself to make the first advances ; and yet it seemed so sad to be at variance with one's own flesh and blood. She had, perhaps, no special reasons for loving her father ; still he was her father, and she could not bear not to be friends with him.

Besides, in the first blush of her married happiness she wished to be at peace with all the world ; she forgave her parents their double-dealing in the matter of Dominic's proposal ; she could afford to do so now that everything had turned out well. Why not send an olive-branch, why not hold out her hand and make overtures towards reconciliation ?

In all this Dominic, who was of a kindly, forgiving spirit, seconded her with all his might. Colonel Forsyth had been furiously angry, no doubt, and in his wrath had said many hard things. After all, there was some excuse for him. The disappointment was perhaps bitter, and Crammersh was a son-in-law more to his liking than the man Winnifred had chosen.

Very soon after their return to London from the Continent, where they had been detained longer than they had intended by the birth of the first child, Winnifred wrote a short civilly-worded note to her father, begging that bygones might be bygones, and

hoping that he would not refuse to see her and her belongings, now that they had come back to town. She could not bear, she said, to live so close and yet feel that she and her father were at daggers drawn.

‘They want to borrow money,’ said Colonel Forsyth, tossing the letter over to Lady Clementina. ‘I did not give them so long; I expected they’d be on the parish before this.’

‘I suppose they *are* wretchedly poor,’ said Lady Clementina with mock commiseration: ‘living from hand to mouth, just upon what he can pick up.’ She spoke of Dominic as of a street musician, or an Italian organ-grinder, dependent for a living upon the coppers of the charitable.

‘What do you mean to do?’

‘They shall not have a penny from me. I’m not overbalanced just now; on the contrary, several of my investments look fishy, and there is no hope of a rise.’

‘I dare say I might find an old dress or

two, or some things that would cut up for the boys.' Lady Clementina gloated over the notion of giving alms to Winnifred. There is something very sweet in piling up small benefits upon poor people you hate ; a far more enjoyable and satisfactory revenge than doing them positive harm.

' You may do as you please ; nothing shall induce me to enter their doors.'

' You do not mind my going to call ?' Lady Clementina asked, who really wished to see with her own eyes the poverty-stricken *ménage* which this girl elected to prefer to Portland Place.

' So long as you don't compromise me. Winnifred must understand that she cannot expect *us* to do anything for her and her pauper husband.'

' You won't make it up with her, Ferdinand ?'

' Not yet, certainly—not till I see how things turn out. And I think, perhaps, it would be better if you waited a little before you went to see them. Write and say you

are going—say I send very kind regards, and leave it like that for the present.'

'Will you receive them if they come here?'

'Not just at first. Say we're going out of town—to Burcham, anywhere—for a month or two.'

'They might think we would lend them the house?'

'That would never do. To prevent any mistakes, say we've let it—the house would be unbearable afterwards with the smell left by his paint-pots.'

'I see Winnifred says they have taken a house already, and are busy fitting it up.'

'Nice fitting up! To be furnished throughout on the new hire system, I suppose. I wonder who's gone security for them. Poor look-out for him! and the landlord had better keep his eyes open. A house indeed! Two pair back on the Surrey-side, would be more in their line. Whereabouts is it?'

'At Pedlar's Green.'

'Never knew there was such a place.'

'Camberwell way, is it? or beyond Islington and Highbury?'

'No, it lies due west. But miles away—cheap neighbourhood, I suppose, and poor.'

'Yes, poor, and poverty-stricken, of course; where the washer-women live, and hang up their linen in the street, and their husbands keep pigs in the back yard. I don't half like your going. Depend upon it there's small-pox about, these roughs won't be vaccinated; or scarlet-fever, or typhus-fever, or something; as likely as not, you will bring back infection.'

'I shall be careful to take plenty of camphor, of course, and we can fumigate the carriage afterwards.'

'You don't mean to go in the carriage, surely? It will be recognised. People know my livery well enough, and I don't care that it should be seen in a London slum.'

'I could go in a cab if you considered it better,' Lady Clementina said submissively.

'I do—a hansom—you like hansoms, and the four-wheelers are only fever traps.'

So a hansom was chartered for the job;

and the driver, after much persuasion and liberal promises, was induced to leave the haunts of civilisation for the wilds of Pedlar's Green.

But although on the road down, noting, as she drove along, how the houses became more and more unambitious, the neighbourhood more desolate and mean, Lady Clementina continued to think of the Gwynnes as of people in a state of semi-starvation, who would thankfully accept the alms of a compassionate, patronising Lady Bountiful like herself, by the time she reached The Farm and crossed its threshold, her ideas had undergone a rapid change.

The place was not the least what she expected. The door was opened by a neat-handed maid, dressed in a quaint garb, which Winnifred called her livery : a drab stuff gown, with white linen fichu, high white cuffs, and mob cap. A pleasant-voiced, properly-trained maid, who ushered Lady Clementina through the narrow hall, bright with etchings framed and choice prints, into the drawing-

room, and left her there, saying Mrs. Gwynne would join her directly.

The delay gave Lady Clementina time to look about her ; to observe, with growing astonishment, the perfect appointments, the cheerful hangings, the artistic furniture, and profuse decorations, evidently by a master-hand. Through the open windows, framed in by clematis and Virginian creeper, was a scrap of jewelled turf, a garden bright with flowers, a mass of kaleidoscope colour, whence came soft airs laden with fragrance, and sounds as of cooing doves and murmurous bees.

Then Winnifred came in radiant and blooming ; the bright young matron happy, and without care, in her own bright happy home.

There was not a word of upbraiding in her voice, as she shook hands warmly, and made her stepmother welcome.

‘I should have come sooner, Winnifred, but, you understand, we were away and——’

‘I quite understand,’ said Winnifred,

cutting her rather short—‘Dominic will be very pleased to see you. He’s busy at present in the painting-room; daylight’s precious; but he’ll come in soon, or we can go to him. Will you have some tea?’ Without waiting, she rang the bell.—‘Tea, Thyrza;’ and tea was presently produced, served upon a choice silver salver which had been picked up in Venice, the cups of beautiful white biscuit ware, also very exquisite.

‘How nice everything is!’ said Lady Clementina ecstatically. ‘I had no notion you would have settled down so comfortably, and so soon.’

‘It has been a slow process. We collected as we went along last year, sent home several freights from the different ports, and then we have done a great deal ourselves—Dominic has worked like a slave.’

She might have added, there was a far keener enjoyment in these surroundings, got together by their own patient industry, than in a dozen palaces in Portland Place, furnished, regardless of cost, by Gillow, Holland,

Jackson and Graham, or any of the great upholsterers of the town. But Mr. Crammersh, and the past, was like a buried hatchet between her and Lady Clementina.

‘I hope father is all right?’ Winnifred asked frankly, as if to imply she bore no malice at his non-appearance at this first call.

‘Perfectly well. He would have come to-day, but I started rather too early——’

‘Oh! of course,’ Winnifred said again, cutting apologies short. ‘I know how busy he is, and how many calls he has upon his time,’ which was a very neat piece of satire. Colonel Forsyth never having had anything to do with his time, from morning till night, for many years past.

‘He is really anxious to be friendly and kind. He is indeed, notwithstanding——’

Winnifred waved her hand, meaning thereby, that bygones had better be bygones, and that it could serve no purpose to re-open the past.

‘He has commissioned me to say, that although he is much pressed, indeed quite

straitened, owing to the falls in—in—somewhere or other——'

‘Niagara, perhaps, or the Zambesi?’

‘No, no; you understand—in stocks or something; although he is very short of money, he is willing to give you what assistance he can, and he proposes to allow you for a time, as long as he can in fact, a hundred a year; and I myself would gladly add to it, by sending down a number of old dresses and things for yourself, or to cut up for the children.’

Winnifred laughed aloud, heartily, scornfully too, so that Lady Clementina felt not a little uncomfortable and ashamed.

‘I really beg your pardon, Lady Clementina. I am very rude; and I know your kindness is well meant. But I don’t think, at the present moment, we stand very much in need of your old dresses, nor yet of my father’s hundred a year. But come, let me show you the rest of the house. It’s not large, and the babies are not large, either. Tommy and Josh, Dominic calls them—one

is to be Sir Joshua some day, the other, a Sir Thomas Lawrence.'

The inspection was made in set form, beginning at the nursery, where Eggleton curtseyed to her ladyship, and seemed as proud of the two boys as though they were her own; and ending in the studio. The afternoon was drawing on, and it was time Dominic should desist from his work.

He was standing in front of his easel; the palette thrown on one side, the mahl-stick on the floor, his arms crossed, and his chin resting thoughtfully on one hand. He did not hear them enter. He was too much absorbed, nor did Winnifred disturb him, motioning with finger on lip to Lady Clementina to keep silence, and waiting patiently and quietly till her husband had thought it all out. Suddenly came the inspiration, and with a morsel of white chalk he indicated certain important alterations in his work. He drew a figure afresh and in a different attitude, rearranged some drapery, and with a confused muddle of strokes and scratches intelligible only to him-

self made a memorandum of the parts he intended to 'treat' differently; then with a sigh of relief he threw the chalk into a far corner of the room and looked round. 'Winnifred, my child, are you there? How long have you been there? I really beg your pardon, Lady Clementina. I was in the clouds. I am glad to see you here,' he said very gravely.

'How do you do, Mr. Gwynne?' Lady Clementina glibly replied, and went on, without waiting to hear, 'So glad to see you again. Don't apologise, pray; I know of old how engrossed you can become when you are at your delightful art. Is this something new? How exquisitely delightful! It's quite a master-piece.'

The picture was only in embryo, but sufficiently advanced to make its meaning plain.

The scene is a London street; the time June, a hot sunshiny day filled with glowing haze, the sunbeams thick laden with golden lights, the sky seemingly quite close, the air

soft and scented as though with sweetly blossoming flowers or ripening fruit; a day when winds are still, when country folk lounge happily among the long grasses lulled by soft songs of birds or the humming of bees. But here in London the season is at its height. Ceaseless movement fills the streets, a throng of vehicles, a crowd on the pavement, turmoil, haste and feverish excitement everywhere visible. It is a 'drawing-room day,' moreover, and the tightly packed, closely mingled traffic is yet further compressed by the space monopolised for the long string of smart carriages stealing at a foot's pace towards St. James's. By some mischance—the driver's obstinacy or the conductor's ignorance—an omnibus has become entangled with the aristocratic *queue*, and under the peremptory orders of Policeman X. a violent effort has been made to extricate the plebeian vehicle from its false position, but only with the result of bringing it into close collision with a magnificent brougham and pair.

This is the moment selected for pictorial representation. The brougham is sideways, the omnibus-end on ; the coachman aloft, in powdered wig and silken calves exchanges choice epithets with the mottle-faced and rather reckless 'bus driver ; one of the occupants of the carriage, a lady in diamonds and ostrich feathers, looks out to see what the disturbance is, and at the same time a family party issue from and descend the omnibus steps. Around this group is centred the principal interest of the picture. Papa, already in the street, holds out his arms to receive the youngest child from his wife ; the wife half in, half out of the door, and encumbered with a second child which clings to her dress from behind.

Strange contrast ! The bright-eyed, cherry-cheeked young mother, plainly dressed, yet strikingly beautiful, with children the image of herself, happy evidently with the joys of contentment and the possession of heaven's greatest blessings. The young husband handsome, stalwart, and strong, proudly con-

scious that his wife and his belongings will bear off the palm against any in the world. So much for one side. On the other, within the brougham, a female face in profile as beautiful quite as that of the young matron, having indeed a strong resemblance to it, but yet in aspect entirely different. Pallid cheeks, mournful eyes, disappointment in every feature; the costly diamonds, aigrette, earrings, and carcanet increase rather than relieve the melancholy, the set unhappy look, of this other wife's face. She is mated to one altogether unworthy of her; there he sits in the far side, a cross between a monkey and a mummy, a wizened peevish worn-out wicked-looking old man. Greed has brought her to this; her own ambition, or the selfishness of her nearest friends: she has worldly position, the very highest perhaps, wealth doubtless unlimited; but love, contentment, happiness—these words will never more have meaning for her.

A striking picture truly; impressive, brimful of sentiment appealing strongly to the

better feelings of the spectator, yet sad and sorrowful in the character of the story it so powerfully and effectively told. Incomplete still, but there was no mistaking, even now, the moral it inculcated. Already it was easy to glean from the admirable likeness between the two wives—sisters, nay, perhaps one and the same person—that by this sharp comparison between the actual and the might-have-been, the painter strove to indicate prophetically the future in store for the girl according to the choice she might make in life.

Lady Clementina could not misunderstand the picture, nor its allusion to the past; but she asked, as if still groping in the dark :

‘ What shall you call it ? It will require a good name—that will be wanted to explain the story—not that it does not tell its own story, of course, still—a good title is *such* a help.’

‘ It is to be called “ An Excellent Match,” ’ Winnifred answered for Dominic, who had gone off just then into the clouds, following

the notion started by Lady Clementina, that perhaps the picture did not tell its own story sufficiently well.

“‘An Excellent Match !’ Capital, so extremely appropriate ; of course they are excellently matched.’ Her ladyship wilfully, or from obtuseness, seemed to have missed the point, and imagined the reference was to the pair of carriage horses, or the two *Jehus* well matched in their war of slang.

‘And what do you propose to do with it, may I ask ?’ as if the object of painting pictures was so obscure that it was a matter of doubt whether they were to be used as skylights, or cut up into great coats.

‘Sell it,’ said Winnifred abruptly. ‘Buy food with it, pay rent, and clothes, and gas, and all the rest of it. Painters must live.’

‘I knew, of course, you would sell it, if possible ; I only wished to know whether it had found a purchaser yet, or whether you intended to keep it for the next Academy, or Suffolk Street, or what.’

‘No need to wait long for a purchaser,

Lady Clementina,' Winnifred said readily, rather glad, perhaps, to have a chance of reference to their prosperity. 'This was sold while the canvas was still blank. So is that, and that, and that'—and Winnifred pointed to several frames, lying with their faces to the wall—'although not a scratch has been put upon one of them yet.'

'Dear me, that's very encouraging. You must be already on the high road to fame, then, Mr. Gwynne. I prophesied it of you, years and years ago. But now tell me, if it is a fair question, what is a picture like this worth ?'

'Not much as a work of art, I'm afraid,' Dominic said deprecatingly, and gently putting aside the somewhat impertinent question. 'The sentiment is too forced. I was obliged to accentuate the old man's unpleasantness, in order to mark the contrast, and this mars the effect.'

But if he was reticent, as modest men are, upon his private affairs, Winnifred, for reasons of her own, had no such scruples.

‘We got twelve hundred for that,’ she said; ‘and it was cheap at the money; but then it’s only a twenty-six, forty-two, and won’t take long to paint.’

‘Twelve hundred!’ exclaimed Lady Clementina, rather surprised—‘Pounds?’

‘No, guineas—what did you think it was? pence or postage stamps?’

‘Why, you must be coining—literally coining money,’ Lady Clementina went on as soon as she had worked out a short sum in mental arithmetic, calculated upon the canvases she had been shown and the prices they would fetch.

‘Well,’ said Winnifred, with a little sigh of contentment, ‘matters are not so bad with us as they might be—at least there is no immediate pressure, no need to draw upon my father’s liberal offer, nor upon your generosity.’

Dominic looked up surprised at this.

‘Lady Clementina has been good enough to offer——’

‘No, no, Winnifred, do not, please, do not,

I entreat you, repeat what I said ; it was well meant, I assure you.'

Dominic turned to Lady Clementina with a grateful smile, and said simply,

'I know you have a good heart, Lady Clementina. I am deeply sensible of the kindness you would do us.'

'Say nothing more about it, please,' cried Lady Clementina, more distressed, perhaps, by Dominic's ill-earned thanks than by Winnifred's comical smile.

So the matter dropped, and they chatted on for half an hour, talking generalities, till Lady Clementina suddenly remembered the cabman at the door.

'What I shall have to pay him ! Something enormous.'

'A cab—you did not come in the carriage, then ?'

'The horse is not quite the thing ; and you know how fidgety your father is about his horses, and rather than delay I took a cab.'

'We always travel by train,' said Winni-

fred. 'The Underground is so handy. Dominic wants me to have a brougham, but I see no necessity; I never go out, and I have few visits to pay.'

'Only it makes you more independent. I like my brougham, I confess.'

'When you can get it,' laughed Winnifred. 'I'm satisfied to go by train, or to walk, unless I stay at home. And we shall want all our money. We mean to build in the spring—Dominic must have a better studio, and the children a day nursery, and the servants' offices are not at all what we could wish.'

These remarks, with those that had previously passed, made due impression upon Lady Clementina Forsyth. When she left, she made her adieux with great warmth and effusion, and on her return to Brook Street, launched out into eulogies, which plainly showed that her stepdaughter and her husband had rapidly advanced into her good graces.

Colonel Forsyth was sceptical and not to

be convinced. 'Well off? Humbug. How can a man who lives by painting be well off? Don't tell me.'

'Oh! but, Ferdinand, there are indeed painters who make very respectable incomes, I have heard it as a fact. Thousands and thousands a year.'

'I don't believe a word of it.'

'But they could not do what they do without money; they build houses, and live in them as well as the best: just as Winnifred and her husband are doing, as I have seen with my own eyes.'

'What, down in Pedlar's Green? Psha!'

'You never knew a prettier house, furnished perfectly; neat servant—'

'A man? In livery?'

'Well, no, it was a maid, certainly.'

Colonel Forsyth shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, 'How could people be living decently if they didn't keep a man—one man at least?'

'They talk of setting up a carriage.'

'How we apples swim! It's a decoy,

depend upon it ; a blind, a sham, to impose upon their tradesmen and creditors.'

'They mean to build, to add to their house. It's not large enough for their wants.'

'Only in order to appear better off than they really are. That's a trick of the trade, velvet outside, rags and brass within.'

'No, but really, they seem to have plenty of ready money ; they appear to be in easy circumstances.'

'They made a fool of you, Clementina—you may as well confess it. It's all swagger. But it won't deceive me, I'm too old a soldier. I'll believe it all when I see it with my own eyes—not before.'

'Come and judge for yourself, then. They want us to dine there one night soon—will you go ? To dine quietly, Winnifred said.'

'I know—boiled leg of mutton and stewed cheese. Like their impudence—no, I'm obliged to you. There are only 365 dinners to be had in the year, and I don't mean to miss one, I can tell you.'

'Winnifred assured me they had a very

decent cook, and she looks into all that sort of thing herself, very successfully I feel sure. You know how clever she is. Won't you be persuaded ?'

' Oh, well, if you make such a point of it,' the colonel said at last, quite testily, ' I suppose I must go ; but let's get it over, the sooner the better ; fix an early night, and beg that it may be only a *partie carrée*, no outsiders. I don't want to run up against any of his low friends, and if it's only a family party, I can come away when I'm bored, which will be soon enough, I'll go bail.'

But Colonel Forsyth was not in the least bored, as it turned out ; on the contrary, he was very much gratified and amused. Winnifred, in the first place, has bestirred herself to make a little *fête* for the occasion. There were good reasons for killing the fatted calf ; the renewal of friendly relations with her father after a long estrangement was an event out of the common, and deserved to be treated as such. She wished also to show off her husband and her home ; the former

as a true gentleman, well able to do the honours in his own house, the latter as a snug comfortable place, sufficient enough to satisfy the most fastidious taste. There was an extra warmth in her greeting; therefore, to which her father was not insensible; yet more was he affected, old Sybarite that he was, by the appeals made to his senses: the pretty drawing-room full of bright colour and good art; the perfectly appointed dining-table, set out after Winnifred's own and original device, white slips upon a crimson cloth; the Salviati glass, and the service of old blue, the hanging lamp with its soft cream-coloured shade—Colonel Forsyth loathed the very name of gas—the decanted champagne, the smooth noiseless waiting of the quick neat-handed maid; above all, the dinner itself. All these tended rapidly to mollify him, and put him in the best of humours. The colonel liked a good dinner, and this was quite to his taste. The *hors d'œuvres* were a novelty at an English table; the *minestrone* soup reminded him of the days of youthful

Italian travel ; the smelts were admirably fried ; there was a *poulet sauté à la Provençale*, a salad of truffles *à la mayonnaise*, a *vanille soufflée* iced, which Colonel Forsyth declared were as good as anything he got at his club. Then the wine was beyond reproach ; the champagne well *frappé*, a bottle of admirable burgundy followed the dinner, and when this was discussed, Winnifred with her own hands made him a cigarette, and ground before his eyes the berries which gave him the best cup of coffee he had tasted for years.

Soothed by such a banquet as this and in the mood that children might play with him, he was finally won over, when Dominic, after Winnifred's wily counsel, consulted him as to investments, and took him into his confidence about his private affairs. Colonel Forsyth was quite vulnerable on the side of finance ; to be credited as astute and sagacious about the disposal of money was the greatest compliment that could be paid him. For years he had dabbled in stocks and shares, with varying fortunes certainly, although,

now and again he made a *coup*, but his principal gain was a little dangerous knowledge and a great deal of cant talk about the relative value of securities.

‘Where have you got your money now?’

‘In the bank—The Metropolitan Limited—they pay me two and a half—’

‘Two and a half!’ shrieked the colonel, ‘when there’s six to be got and seven by simply holding up your hand. That’ll never do. At least, I mean you are turning your back upon a distinct increase of income. If the bank balance is large, that is to say—’

‘About four thousand,’ Dominic said openly, and at once.

‘Really you must excuse me, but it’s too preposterous. Suppose the bank were to break; or suppose, suppose—But what is most to the point is the interest: you ought to get more, you ought indeed.’

‘What would you advise?’

‘Well, there’s Egypts—you can’t do better. This year’s issue is cheap, dirt cheap, and Perus and Eries, and a lot more. But I tell

you what—go and consult my brokers Kick-kup and Strongbow.'

'Would they advise? would they mind doing my business for me?' asked simple Dominic, thinking they were perhaps doing him a favour.

'They'll be delighted, only too delighted; and say I sent you; mention my name; that's all—you'll be well treated you may depend.'

'Innocent as a babe,' Colonel Forsyth said afterwards in speaking of Dominic, 'but a good sort—and they seem very snug and happy, and perhaps everything has happened for the best.'

CHAPTER III.

THE little dinner described in the last chapter was not the first or the only one of its kind, although, under the circumstances, it was perhaps more *soignée* and more sumptuous than the parties the Gwynnes usually gave. In a quiet way, and within their own small circle, they were very hospitably inclined. Almost from the time of their return and settlement in town they had kept open house for their friends—Dominic's friends, chiefly, whom Winnifred, with great good sense, had also made hers. Not only had she wisely sought to shake herself free from the commonplace acquaintances of her former sphere in life, but she had laboured hard to identify herself, as a painter's wife, with painters and members of the craft; yet more, she had spared no pains to discover whom among

them Dominic liked, and she had done her best to like them too. Young wives sometimes, for their sins, adopt an opposite course, and yield to silly jealousy of old associations, dreading lest they should reassert their sway and dispute with them their husbands' hearts. This is one of the first of the sunken rocks that threaten the safe voyage of the matrimonial barque; but Winnifred knew, and steered clear of it. Her house should be the gathering place and centre of all Dominic's comrades, old companions, and friends.

Not that they came very readily at first. The marriage had been much discussed at the time, and many men, mostly members of the Zooks, deplored in no measured terms the fatal mistake made by Dominic Gwynne. To marry a swell wife! A great dame who had been brought up to think of art only as it appeared in the Parisian fashions; whose only ideas of happiness lay in gadding about and parading herself in the park and at every gay gathering in the town. She would ruin him; waste his powers and his time; intro-

duce him to a lot of stuck-up people who did not know a good picture from a bad one ; who would sneer at him, despise him, check his upward progress, and when he had utterly failed would cut him, without compunction, dead—dead as a door nail.

Much of this, it must be confessed, was to be traced directly to Guy Greatorex, to churlish, discontented Guy, who could not bring himself to see any good in Winnifred. Nothing would have induced him to cordially approve of her as a suitable wife for his *protégé* and friend. When asked, as he was repeatedly, what he thought of the match, he growled out always that it would never do ; it could not answer ; he knew the girl, and all about her ; that she was not the right sort, quite the reverse ; that she would immediately sever Dominic from his old life ; that they had seen the last of him, and might say good-bye to him, with more to the same affect.

The first Saturday, therefore, at the Zeuxis on which Dominic appeared, the men hung rather aloof, and looked rather askance. Not

until they were warmed with food and wine did they address him much, and then only with badinage and chaff.

‘How comes it you’re let out, Dominic?’ asked one.

‘Thought you dined at Buckingham Palace every night,’ said another.

‘Got any royal commissions yet?’ enquired a third.

‘Wonder the duchess lets you out of her sight,’ and so on.

‘I shall never miss my Saturdays,’ Dominic replied gravely, meaning to dispose at once of the imputation that he was tied to his wife’s apron strings.

‘Come, that’s better, Nick. Are you settled down yet?’

‘Nearly. We’re ready, anyhow, to receive our friends. Come out, Stevens, and have a chop with us to-morrow—The Farm, Pedlar’s Green. You’ll find it easily enough.’

‘Well, I’m afraid not. I thought of going down into the country for the day.’

‘Will you come, Lubbock?’

Another excuse.

‘Or you, Billy? Or you? Or you?’ and so on with half a dozen, always with the same negative result.

Dominic was too simple and unsuspecting to suppose there were any reasons other than those stated for these refusals. He would never have guessed that his old friends hung back from shyness or disinclination to make his wife’s acquaintance. It would have gone on like this week after week, but one day old Stevens, walking erect out of Roberson’s shop, and looking straight to his front as if he was marching past the Queen, fell almost into Dominic’s arms.

‘This is my wife, Stevens. Let me introduce you.’ And the old artist, with the look of a dragoon colonel, was fairly caught.

‘I have heard of you so often, Mr. Stevens,’ Winnifred said, in that penetrating voice of hers, which attracted him at once. ‘You are a great friend of Dominic’s, I know, and you must be also of mine.’

‘Come out and dine with us,’ cried

Dominic heartily ; and old Stevens was led off.

It was a delightful dinner, of course—in itself excellent, like that given the Colonel and Lady Clementina ; but it was brighter and more cheerful, for the talk was gay and rippling throughout. Winnifred conversed pleasantly and well upon the subjects she knew would please Stevens best. She amused him, rallied him, deferred to him by turns ; so that by the time he got up to go away he was her sworn slave for life.

‘ I hope you will come again soon, and often,’ she said with a frank smile, which gave her words an air of the most absolute sincerity. She liked him, of course ; but she wished also that he should like her.

Old Stevens was quite knocked over from that evening. He had taken the shilling and was enlisted to serve her for ever and ever. He went back to the Zooks for his four-pennyworth of rum hot, and could talk of nothing else but Nick Gwynne’s new wife for the rest of the night.

‘She’s one of the nicest women I ever met in my life. I don’t know, and never did know, her equal. As for looks—you must paint her, Gayless, no one else could do her justice. I told her so, and she said she was much flattered. She knows your work right well, and admires it hugely. She knows everybody’s work—mine even.’ This, indeed, had been one of the first of Winnifred’s shots which had told upon him. Your artist, whatever his line—letters, marble, pictures, the stage—is ever grateful to those who appear to show an intimate acquaintance with what they have done or can ‘do.’

‘I’ve seldom seen a woman so well up in it all. She knows Lubbock’s a Frenchman ; that Grimsby won’t paint for anyone under a lord ; that Fittywichet’s portraits are immensely prized, especially by himself—and all the rest of it. Her views upon the remodelling and reconstruction of the Royal Academy deserve to be printed. She knows the National Gallery by heart ; and does not rave about foreign pictures, forgetting or

ignoring altogether the good ones we have at home ; and what's best of all, she can paint —herself—first-class. She's been hung on “the line” already—not that that proves much, but she has sold as well, which is more to the point.’

‘ ‘Pon my scul, Stevens, you're quite sickening !’ cried Guy Greatorex, who had been chafing inwardly at every syllable of this long eulogy.

‘ Well ; what have you got to say against her ?’ replied Stevens, up in arms at once.

‘ I've known her longer than you have, and my opinion doesn't coincide with yours. That's all. But this is no place to discuss the question.’

‘ There I quite agree with you. But I leave men to judge for themselves. As for you, old Guy, if a seraph were being praised, you'd find fault with his way of flying or the colour of his wings.’

Men did judge for themselves. Several called at The Farm on the first excuse, and came away, like Stevens, thoroughly pleased.

Winnifred had a bright smile and a kind word for all. The younger she buoyed up with pleasant prophecies of coming fame, the elders she encouraged and consoled, when dissatisfied and disheartened, by reminding them how many good men had been insufficiently honoured in their own time. Her gaiety and unvarying good spirits, the readiness with which she adapted herself to her society, her wise concessions to little breaches of etiquette, her surrender of the conventional white tie and tail coat at her little banquets, the admission of unlimited tobacco, and the open freedom of talk—these gained her popularity, rapid and wide. Her husband's painter-friends looked upon her as raised a little above them, perhaps, but by no means unduly exalted thereby; rather disposed readily to act as a comrade and thoroughly sympathetic 'pal.' Nor was it against her that she was a singularly beautiful woman, of attractive presence as well as engaging ways. Artists are singularly susceptible to the glamour of good looks, and Winnifred did not reign less

securely or supremely in that slice of the art world which was now her home because she was so peerlessly fair.

Yet there was one man among them all who still resolutely resisted her empire, who still positively refused to bend his neck to her yoke. Nothing would induce Guy Greatarex to modify his unfavourable opinion of her ; he would not be persuaded even to visit at the house. Still suspicious, distrustful, uncharitable, he was as firmly convinced as ever that this wife was not the right wife for Dominic Gwynne ; he still prophesied evil for the future, although in the immediate present he could find no fault.

His persistent rejection of their overtures towards friendliness and intimacy gave Dominic much pain, and a certain coldness grew up between them. Winnifred was not so keenly affected. What did she care for this cross old man or what he thought of her ? If he did not choose to accept her invitations, the loss was his, not hers. He might stay away. No doubt he abused her finely ; remem-

bered against her all her old silly escapades and foolish ways. *Soit.* He was utterly wrong, of course. But what did it matter? There was no need for her to justify herself to him or to anybody else ; her demeanour, and the even tenour of her life, must prove plainly, sooner or later, that she was a changed person, quite.

They went out nowhere. Invitations came, but they were quietly declined. It was in truth still honeymoon time with them, and the hollow festivities of the world could offer them no inducements to surrender the calm delights of their conjugal *tête-à-tête*.

Not that they always lived secluded or alone. As we have seen, they eagerly encouraged visitors of the sort that suited them ; nor did they remain buried like recluses in unbroken retirement at The Farm. They took their diversions abroad in an unconventional, but, to Winnifred, highly enjoyable fashion. There was much for which she had to be thankful in her marriage with Dominic Gwynne ; but one, and by no means the

smallest item of enjoyment, was the complete freedom of action which was possible now. With her husband she had now many new and strange 'outings.' They visited together plebeian places of amusement ; tea-gardens at the east end, music-halls at the west ; they frequented transpontine theatres ; or sat, for choice, among the 'gods' at the Haymarket or Drury Lane ; rejoicing also in oranges and ginger-beer, and following strictly the old rule of doing always as was done at Rome. They dined at funny eating-houses, famed each for its speciality—tripe, cowheel, or steak and kidney pie ; or ordered a *recherche* repast at French restaurants in the purlieus of Soho. They went down to the Derby together in a hansom, and to Ascot by train, third class, dressed in the plainest garments, and mingling with the crowd on equal, affable terms. Dominic always insisted that the true artist should dive into every depth for subjects for his brush ; that he should master the distinctive characteristics of every type ; see, with his own eye, scenes the most diverse and

strange. They took long walks, therefore, through the length and breadth of the mighty town ; observing life in crowded thoroughfare, in silent, unfrequented city square ; they explored the last of the black, worm-eaten wharves, with falling timbers and slimy fore-shores, down about the Pool ; they ate their midday meal at Billingsgate, or dropped down to Greenwich for tea. Sometimes they chose night for their promenade, standing in mute admiration upon the bridges—Westminster or Lambeth—noting the long lines of lights on the Embankment, like a vast illumination, while high into the starry sky rose the giant outlines of the clock-tower and the Houses of Parliament ; or, if it was Saturday, picking their way among the barrows in Oxford Market, Leather Lane, or Rochester Row. It was rarely that they suffered inconvenience. Now and again their incognito might be questioned, and they ran the risk of some rough chaff ; but it passed away when, at sight of Dominic busy with his note-book, it was obvious he also was a worker, compelled,

like others, to earn his bread. Sometimes at earliest dawn they struggled to the top of St. Paul's, and saw the sun rise over the eastern verge of the town, or looked down upon London, in strange, unfamiliar garb of white cleanliness, as though it had done penance and was purged of its sins. Sometimes, again, they made their way to a point on the river not far distant from Pedlar's Green, and there took boat, to spend the quiet gloaming hours upon the silent highway of the Thames.

It was pleasanter, this, than being stewed alive in crowded, steaming drawing-rooms, or wasting over formal banquets the summer twilight hours. Often enough on their journey citywards or *en route* to the play, Winnifred passed mansions which she had entered again and again as a guest. One was being got ready, perhaps, for some function that very night ; carpenters were fixing the temporary porch, or laying down a carpet across the flags. In another the feast was close at hand, already a *queue* of carriages waiting to

discharge their precious cargoes, while the open doors disclosed glimpses of blissful halls, peopled by gorgeous flunkies in aiguillettes and powder, or the lights flashed upon the diamonds and gorgeous robes of the illustrious guests. Winnifred wished them joy ; she was perfectly contented and satisfied to have done with such things. Society had no longer any claims upon her ; it was long since it had possessed any charms. Others might tread the never-ending wheel ; she preferred to escape out of the whirl.

It was delicious, again, when the season and summer heats were at their height to steal away out into the country and revel in an open-air life ; to charter a great roomy vehicle, half barouche, half van, and with all their belongings — babies, easels, canvases, and pots and pans — crawl at a foot's pace through blossoming lanes and bye-paths, calling a halt when the humour seized them, and lingering, perhaps, for days in a remote village or half-forgotten town, while Dominic filled his sketch-book with studies, and Win-

nifred won the affections of the rustics by her homeliness and good sense. Still more charming was it to hire a 'house-boat,' and live altogether upon the Thames ; passing a semi-amphibious existence, sometimes on the water, sometimes on shore ; having many comforts, although few luxuries, in their floating home. A 'living room,' bedroom and kitchen, only, plainly furnished, but sufficient for their needs. Alongside was a pair-oar in which they spent half their time, pulling in among the osiers and the pollard willows, trying conclusions with the swans, or making fast beneath the over-hanging leafage of the islet—reading, sketching, chatting, fondling or chiding the children by turns.

On one of these expeditions, leaving their house-boat, which was snugly moored just above Streatley Bridge, they had gone off together, with lunch, to spend the day exploring up the stream. They had landed upon an island a little short of Moulsford, and having spent a lazy forenoon, were pre-

paring to re-embark and drop down home-wards gain, when a procession of gaily-decorated barges and large boats with flags, headed by a steam-launch, came full upon them.

Evidently a picnic party. 'People of distinction,' Winnifred said, with a little mocking laugh, as though she was quite out of the pale, and had no respect or reverence for those within it.

They made no particular haste to pull away, being perfectly indifferent whether the Lord Mayor was approaching or the Prince of Wales himself, and feeling they had as good a right to the river as the greatest luminaries of the land. Therefore it was that their modest wherry, and themselves its still more modest, unpretending occupants, passed under the close inspection of a number of critical eyes. Rude people; they showed their quality by the way they stared. Had they never seen an artist out on the war path, accompanied by his family and surrounded by the weapons he employed?

Winnifred treated them one and all in return to a smile of the most ineffable disdain, when to her surprise she caught sight of Mr. Crammersh, seated in awful state upon the deckhouse of the launch.

He had seen her also ; their eyes met. What should she do ? Almost without hesitation she gave herself the answer, and bowed graciously and with perfect good humour.

In reply he treated her to a scowl ; a dark, black, forbidding scowl which sat rather strangely upon his florid rubicund face.

Then Winnifred knew that he bore malice still ; and she hoped it might never come to pass that she should want his good word.

But when they had made good their escape from this pretentious flotilla, she laughed aloud, and her husband asked her the reason.

‘ Didn’t you see Mr. Crammersh on the steam launch ? He looked unutterable things at me.’

‘No wonder, poor man.’

‘Dominic,’ his wife whispered to him, ‘tell me. It’s not likely he would have it in his power to injure us, do you think?’

‘Mr. Crammersh? Scarcely. Why should he? What makes you afraid of anything of the sort?’

‘I think he would if he could.’

Not many days later Christison, the dealer, hunted them up at Streatley. He was in the neighbourhood, he said, and hearing Mr. and Mrs. Gwynne were not far off, he had made so bold as to call.

He was full of civility, profuse with his obliging offers. Had Mr. Gwynne—Christison was now most punctilioously polite—anything new upon the stocks? Anything ready, half finished, or only just begun?

‘Name your figure. It’s yours, money down,’ he went on, with delightful candour, as he flourished his cheque-book to and fro.

Dominic did not reply immediately, and therefore Winnifred spoke.

‘There are two or three landscapes.’

Christison turned up his nose.

‘Nothing else? I’ll take them, if there’s nothing else. But I say, Mr. Gwynne, why do you waste your time and your precious gifts over such trash? The figger, that’s the caper. Him as can draw the figger should stick to the figger, and he’ll make a figger at any figger you like. You should start him on something big, Mrs. Gwynne. Say the Houses of Parliament Assembled, or the Tichborne Trial, or the Boat Race; something modern and startling, that’s the line to take. No more of your old Greeks. Had enough of the ancients. Stick to modern days.’

‘I have a notion — only imperfectly sketched out—and it’s too soon to show it; but it’s a good notion, I think.’

‘Large canvas?’

‘Ten feet by four—or thereabouts—modern subject.’

‘I’ll have it. I must, at anything you like. There’s a blank cheque, fill it up; or I’ll leave it with you, fill it up when you please,

for what you please. I'm open with you, you see, free and above board. But I must have it, at your own price.'

'You'd better wait till you see it. I haven't stirred a finger in it yet.'

'I don't care a rush. I've every confidence in you. But let's strike the bargain, now and at once. Say I give you a lump sum down on the nail—a thou.—more or less, as you please. And you just sign a strip of paper to say the picture is to be mine. The next Academy picture we'll call it. It will be ready by then?'

'Sure to be,' said Dominic, hopefully. His pictures beforehand seemed so easy that he expected always to finish them within a week or two.

He was about to sign his name to the document which Christison offered with the cheque when Winnifred interposed. It seemed a little strange that the dealer should have come thus provided with a paper of the kind, and some curious presentiment prompted her to be on her guard.

‘Wait. Dominic, you are in Mr. Christison’s debt already. You have not yet given him those pictures you promised some time back.’

‘No, but the three are all but ready. A few hours’ work is all they want.’

‘Don’t you think it will be better to wipe off one score before you begin another?’

‘Anything you advise, my child,’ Dominic said, looking at her lovingly. ‘We’ll wait, I think, Mr. Christison. Come again, when the picture is well started. In the meantime I’ll send you the others with all possible despatch.’

The dealer grumbled a good deal, talked of people standing in their own light, of the folly of refusing hard cash when it was offered, and used many arguments to induce Dominic to alter his decision. But he was obstinate, and presently Christison went away.

‘What made you interfere, Mrs. Nick?’ the painter afterwards asked his wife.

‘A sudden inspiration. I shouldn’t like

you to lose your independence, which you might if you got into that—or any other man's power. And you will try and finish those three pictures for Mr. Christison—at once? To oblige me?’

‘Of course, my child, of course,’ Dominic promptly replied. And he meant it from his heart, only the wish was stronger than his strength of will.

The difficulty of keeping Dominic up to his work was indeed the only cloud that came to mar the perfect serenity of Winnifred's life. It would have been more than unfair to have called Dominic Gwynne an indolent man; he was not lazy or slothful, only over-fastidious. He never could please himself, and the greater his success the more fastidious he became. He had been singularly dissatisfied with his own efforts from the first; even when only on the climb, the best work he did fell terribly short of the level at which he had aimed.

But now when he had taken rank among the most promising painters of the day, and

had given to the world more than one decisive proof of his strength, he lived in a continual fever lest his subsequent pictures should suffer by comparison with his first. He was perhaps a little jealous of his own fame ; a failing not altogether free from the taint of vanity and self-consciousness, but in its way a virtue too. There are some men amongst us who rest only too gladly upon their oars, who point back to the rapids through which they have fought with courage and skill, and are content to drift for ever after upon the broad waters of mediocrity, without any further effort to achieve yet greater success.

It was not in lack of industry, however, that Dominic merited reproach. He was laborious and painstaking to a fault, but as often as not his energies were misdirected or misapplied. His brush and pencil were always busy enough, when he was possessed with an idea for a picture. The preparations he made were vast and untiring, deep was the research, repeated his experiments, colos-

sal the materials he collected for his task. But his efforts, praiseworthy in themselves, were often desultory and barren of proper results. He was easily tempted to turn aside to follow any *ignis fatuus* of congenial employment that held out a sufficiently enticing line. He was not unlike a schoolboy then, only too ready to grasp at an excuse for playing truant and evading his lessons.

Of a morning, when our treacherous London light for once was clear and strong, on a perfect 'sky day,' as painters term it, when it behoved him to make the most of every second of time, he lingered over his breakfast, or wasted an hour in critical talk with a friend, or persisted in reading his batch of Tichborne evidence from beginning to end. Then Winnifred would rouse him with one word—

'Dominic!' at sound of which, and with the guilty look of a scolded pet, he would hasten away to his studio and his work.

But when actually arrived at his easel, he was like the horse taken to the water to

drink. As often as not he still 'shied' and jibbed, spent an hour in arranging a cabinet of curiosities, another in sorting brushes ; or, lost in a train of thought, sat upon his studio stool and gazed vacantly at his canvas with no more interest than if it was a blank wall, or a picture by the greatest duffer in the art-world.

Other mornings he would offer himself up a willing sacrifice to his children. He was really their slave. Such orders as they issued he obeyed with immediate unquestioning submission. To-day Tommy brings him a hunch of wood and puts it into his hand, together with a blunt clasp-knife.

'Make me a boat, pup.'

Dominic might have been born upon the Clyde, or a near relation of Noah, so keen is he to show his skill in ship-building. But nevertheless he goes through the form of a protest.

'I mustn't. Mum says I mustn't.'

'Mum says nuffin of the kind. Go on, pup, please.'

Dominic surrenders only too gladly, and presently the floor is littered with chips. When Winnifred enters to see how the painting progresses she finds, instead of a picture, that the lines of a gallant craft have been laid to oblige her eldest son.

Next day Dominic turns toy mender in ordinary to Master Josh.

‘Mend my dog, pup.’

‘What have you been doing to it?’

‘Opened it to see what was inside. Now there’s no bark.’

‘Bark’s outside,’ cried Tommy; ‘ain’t it, pup?’

‘Well, you bark with your inside, don’t you, pup; and bite?’ Josh replied, with some acrimony, as though he intended very shortly to show his teeth.

Dominic, to keep the peace, takes the toy in hand, and is soon intensely interested by its internal mechanism. So absorbed, indeed, that he is quite unconscious of Winnifred’s presence.

‘Really, Dominic, you are too bad.’

Then he looks up.

'I ought to have been a toy maker,' he says, with a deprecating smile.

'Anything but a painter.'

She is vexed for the moment, and slightly irritated against him.

'I suppose it's too late to take to a new trade,' Dominic says, following the train of thought. 'But I have a great fancy for mechanical work—with pains I might have been an inventor.'

'You think so? Have you the assurance to suppose that you would ever have been anything but an idle, good-for-nothing, procrastinating, desultory—'

'I say, Winnifred, come, don't be too hard on me.'

'*Will* you go and work?'

She has seized him by the ear, and is pinching it affectionately. Already the short spasm of anger has disappeared. She could not be hard on this husband of hers. He disarmed her by his submissiveness.

'That picture ought to be finished out of

hand. You have promised it to Christison next week. You'll never finish it by that time. I shall have to do it for you.'

'I wish to heaven you would. I'm nearly sick of it; and you paint ever so much better than I do.'

Winnifred laughed at the far-fetched statement, complimentary though it was.

'Mr. Christison would hardly agree. To say nothing of the dishonesty. He wants Dominic Gwynne, not Winnifred his wife.'

'It wouldn't be the first time you had lent me a helping hand.'

'The less said about that the better.'

The truth being that now and again when hard pressed Winnifred had contributed not a little to the completion of a halting work: unimportant details, backgrounds, masses of drapery, and so forth; portions such as the old Italian giants confided to their pupils, reserving to themselves only the master strokes on vital points.

CHAPTER IV.

BUT although Winnifred held aloof from society, there was one entertainment at which she felt in duty bound to assist : this was the annual *soirée* of the Royal Academy at Burlington House.

The greater part of the art-world would be there ; the best of it, or at least that part of it which was the most successful and flourishing. Some painters yield a very moderate allegiance to the Academy ; secure in their own self-esteem, or fortified by the plentiful incense of their educated adherents and admirers, they count themselves far above all Academicians past, present, and to come. These stay away. So do others, again, who, disappointed or dissatisfied at inadequate recognition of their deserts, sulk in their tents at home. A number cannot help themselves,

being still out in the cold. But the large force of regulars, the active army, still remain who are content to fight hard for their daily bread under the Academy flag, and for them the Academy *soirée* is an official affair, a species of court ceremonial at which all are glad to be seen.

Winnifred looked at it rather in the last-mentioned light. She was proud of the opportunity of making open confession of faith, pleased to be able to acknowledge thus publicly the ranks she had joined, the banner under which she was ranged; she took it as a compliment that she had been honoured with a special invitation as the wife of the rising painter Gwynne. Often before had she gone to the *soirée*, as other people in society go, but never with the same interest or pride as now.

It was, as usual, a very crowded gathering. People pressed a dozen deep up the wide staircase towards the landing, from which the turnstile had been removed, and where stood the courtly old President, wearing around his neck his gold chain of office, and upon his

lips a perpetual smile. Close behind him, ranged in serried rows, troops and troops of guests, who had made their bow, lingered to watch others arrive. Among these were numbers of good honest folk to whom this was the one sole revelation of fashionable life ; unpretending artistic people, who dwelt all the year in outer darkness, exiled from 'good society,' as the Peri was from Paradise, and who thought that for this night only they were admitted within the hallowed pale. With them were also many members of the Upper Ten, waiting also, because they were distinctly amused by what they saw. Often enough a little buzz of excitement went the round as certain names were announced, followed by open audible comments, complimentary, critical, abrupt, sometimes unkind.

' The Archimandrite of Nilos, His Highness the ex-Tycoon of Japan, Field Marshal Sir Hector Haveitout, Lady Burslem Potts and the Misses Burslem Potts, Mr. and Mrs. Rembrandt Smith, Lord Pinto, Mr. Tinto, Captain Corkoran, Mr. Snerks, Mr. Lubbock, Mr.

Greatorex, Mr. Stevens, Mr. Byles (these were Zooks who came in a body for self-defence), the Duchess of Hammersmith, Mr. Crammersh and Lady Adeline Crammersh, &c., &c.'

Very differently did the new comers acquit themselves as they followed their names into the presence. The *haute aristocratie*, like the duchess, sailed in with supreme, almost insolent, self-possession ; the generals and captains also, having presumably in their time, walked up to something more lethal than the master of a house. The distinguished foreigners, again, acquitted themselves with perfect ease and *sang froid*. More trying was the ordeal to many an unassuming man of talent, to artists, more skilful with their hands than with their feet, who had little time and less opportunity for studying graceful deportment or the most approved method of making a bow. Some of these bobbed their heads and hurried past the President as though they owed him a bill and they feared he would ask for immediate

cash payment ; others paused, irresolutely debating whether it would not be better to turn tail and run. Their ladies sometimes shared their shyness, making either exaggerated curtseys or only abrupt half-defiant nods, and most seemed glad to get past the point of danger and hide in among the rest of the crowd.

Still the ceremony went on.

‘His Royal Highness Prince—’

‘Oh *do* let me look,’ says an agonised girlish voice.

‘Whichever is it ? Not that mite ?’

‘No, you stupid ; he’s the eddycong.’

‘Isn’t he sweet-looking ? and do look. Here’s a handsome pair ! Members of the court circle, I make no doubt.’

‘Which ? Those ? Pah ! They’re only artists—at least, he is, or pretends to be. Them’s the Gwynnes.’

Mr. and Mrs. Dominic Gwynne, no less ; who march in not long after the Prince ; she as a matter of course quite cool and collected, he taking courage from her.

Then the greeting they received was especially gracious.

The President shook hands with them both, and the Prince, who was still at his side, followed suit, with a smile, and some civil words which gave Winnifred rank at once as a person of the highest consideration.

‘Sir Francis is speaking to them !’ says one ; ‘and the Prince has shaken hands with her. Dear me.’

‘She is a swell ; and did you hear what Sir Francis said ? He told her she must make her husband paint another fine thing like the Lotos Eaters, and that he hoped to see Mr. Gwynne one of their number.’

‘In the Academy ! Never !’

‘And the Prince said—I heard him—“I hear you’ve got the prettiest house in London, Mrs. Gwynne. I trust I may be permitted to call and see it.”’

So the talk ran on. The entrance of the Gwynnes had been noticed and commented on by many. Not a few knew Dominic personally ; more by repute. A young painter

who had recently married under rather romantic circumstances was an interesting person to the art ladies, while his rapid success and the ease with which he had made his mark, concentrated upon him the attention of the men. He was fast becoming prominent enough to arouse the envy and jealousy of his peers ; an evil inevitable, for painters are human, and suffer no less than the members of other professions from such agitating passions. Yet he was still popular enough ; and even those who disliked him would have admitted that he was a fine specimen of a man, as with head erect and throwing back his curls he strode in triumphant with the wife he had won.

Had he not good reason to be proud ? Was there such another as his Winnifred in the room, or indeed in the whole world ! Winnifred herself was looking her best. She was buoyant, jubilant in her manner, her carriage independent, her eyes bright and fearless as she glanced around, not defying criticism, but seemingly unconscious of it.

The Duchess of Hammersmith had paused with the rest at the grand entrance, and was talking with Sir Hector Haveitout. She was criticising and condemning with a pungent malevolence which might have brought her, perhaps, an angry retort or a broken head had her sex been different and the scene elsewhere.

‘What strangely odd people there are in the world? Could you believe it contains such guys? I wonder where they come from, and where they go to after it is all over?’

There was some reason for the remark. Just then had entered, one after the other, a string of curiously dressed ladies.

First, a Japanese woman who had copied her dress exactly from a twopenny fan. Next, two Roman matrons with hair brought low over their foreheads, in loose robes, with only a knotted rope around their waists, and a look in their eyes as though they had come straight from the amphitheatre, having ‘*habet*’ still upon their tongues, and their thumbs still turned down.

‘This, now,’ went on the duchess, ‘this is the highest flight of æstheticism, I think.’

Three girls, sisters apparently, and equally good-looking, but all most wondrously arrayed. It had seemed good to them to return to first principles, and to restore fashion in dress to its ancient primitive simplicity. Their costume was quite Arcadian, and their dresses were as old, to look at them, as the siege of Troy, or the first Peloponnesian War. They wore pale buff, faded pink, and ghostly blue, respectively; those dull colourless shades which time and mildew best give; their dresses were cut severely plain, and fell straight in such hard rigid lines unrelieved by frill or flounce or trimming of any kind, that they might have been under-garments with unmentionable names. The girls themselves were similarly quite without ornament; only they owned pretty pallid faces, and plenty of irregular light towy hair.

‘I think they must have forgotten to put

on the rest of their clothes,' said the old Field Marshal, with a wicked grin.

'I shall speak to the Lord Chamberlain if he's here. This place ought to be licensed like a theatre, and strictly censored. I do detest anything that verges on the improper.' The duchess was furiously virtuous in her old age. 'Vulgarity's better. Such as this.'

The wife of a much patronised portrait-painter, who having no ideas of her own borrowed a little from the style of several of her husband's sitters. If she had any taste at all it lay in the direction of gorgeous display. Nature, she said, with that intimate knowledge of her which only the artist's wife can be supposed to acquire — nature was daring in her profuse use of the most glaring pigments, and she desired to emulate nature, but was not very successful in the attempt. The vivid contrasts upon a brilliantly plumed bird, or in the fields when the crimson poppies bloom amidst the yellowing corn, are arranged with such subtle skill that they never offend the eye. Poor Mrs. Simkins,

with her lavish employment of lilac and green, mauve and blue, rich yellows and staring reds, simply destroyed all sense of colour. To-night her dress was a vivid lilac or mauve, not entirely free from a suspicion of Judson's dyes; this dress, trimmed with purple velvet, was made high, and round the throat was a crimson Oriental neckerchief, emblazoned with Arabic characters worked in gold; over her arm she carried a silken scarf of Scotch tartan—great green and yellow squares with red and blue lines. She was evidently fond of profuse personal adornment. This was yet more plainly evident from the jewelry with which she was covered; the chains and lockets and watches she wore, the snake bangle bracelets, and the great hoop in the centre of which was an enormous photograph of her dear lord.

‘That’s a nice specimen. Did you ever see such a marvellous “get up,” Sir Hector?’

‘Never, upon my life! Never, by Ged, never! I have come across some smart

apparel in the West Indies, among the blacks, but this beats all. Any more?' as the duchess made another movement of disapproval and contempt.

It was at this moment that Mr. and Mrs. Dominic Gwynne had arrived.

'Ah!' said Sir Hector, without waiting. 'You're right. This is more like the correct thing.'

The duchess drew a long breath, and then said venomously, 'I wonder she can dare to show her face.'

'Who may she be, duchess, and what has she done?'

'I should be sorry to tell you what she has done—in so many words.' Explanation, indeed, was impossible without adverting to Mr. Crammersh, and the duchess did not care it to be widely known that Lady Adeline had taken up with Winnifred's leavings.

'Ged, she's a beauty, and no mistake! Wonder I never saw her before. She could not have been going last time I was in England.'

‘I can’t admire her—I never did. She has such a bold face and forward manner. Look at her with Sir Francis.’

‘I wish I were Sir Francis,’ continued the Field Marshal. ‘Gwynne. Wasn’t that it? Gwynne? One of the Welsh Gwynnes—Montgomeryshire—I suppose?’

‘Pshaw! He’s only a painter. Belongs to no Gwynnes you ever heard of, General. He’s the first of his line, I expect.’

‘Who was she? Have you any idea?’

‘A Miss Forsyth—Winnifred Forsyth.’

‘God bless my soul! Now I understand. There was a silly young jackanapes came out to me in India, he was on my staff, Fitz-Hugh—Captain FitzHugh, of the Scarlet Guards—he was always raving about her. But now I can quite understand.’

‘I have no doubt you would soon rave about her too, Sir Hector. But you’re not likely to see her again in a hurry.’

‘Going away? Abroad?’

‘No; but she has dropped out of our world, you know.’ The duchess continued

her remarks in rather a louder tone, seeing, with a woman's quickness of perception, that Winnifred was quite within earshot, having taken up her station close by while Dominic hung back to speak to a friend. 'A second-rate artist's wife is not quite the person to go into good society, or to be taken much notice of. She has made a *mésalliance*, and must abide by the consequences of her own act.'

Winnifred caught the ill-natured words. Were they meant for her? Had she really made a *mésalliance*? No: a thousand times no. A great painter, whose works would live for ages, was better than a beggarly duke, who had contributed less than nothing to the stock of the world's wisdom. The name of Gwynne would be a title of honour, remembered on its own account, when the sixth or seventh Duke of Hammersmith would be indistinguishable from a dozen other dukes. But the bare imputation was a barbed arrow which wounded Winnifred to the quick, and she longed to hurl it back upon the malevolent speaker.

Next moment she thought differently. Time would show, and that right soon, of what stuff this man was made whom she had preferred to all the world. The Duchess of Hammersmith would cease to sneer then.

Nevertheless one small immediate revenge Winnifred permitted herself, and was thankful to her Grace for giving her the chance. When Dominic rejoined her she took his arm, and moving off met the duchess face to face. The old lady seized the opportunity of staring insolently at Winnifred, then gave her a little contemptuous nod, as she might to a crossing-sweeper, or a boy who sold matches in the street.

Winnifred in return cut her quite dead, adding audibly to her husband—

‘Who was that old fright? A friend of yours?—or a model?—or what?’

At which the duchess then and there collapsed. This rather easy victory put Winnifred in high spirits. They increased as she made the tour of the rooms and re-

newed her acquaintance with many old friends. It was a night of meetings. There are occasions, known to all dwellers in this wilderness of town, when London may be traversed from end to end without encountering a single acquaintance ; others, when at every second step—in the club, in shops, at every corner of the street—friends crop up in crowds. So it was with Winnifred this night. There seemed to be collected in these rooms all the people she knew or had ever met ; they came round her in dozens. A few R.A.'s, who were crushingly patronising and civil ; Dominic's own painter comrades, ready all of them to make obeisance and do homage to his beautiful wife ; numbers also of the social world, with many congratulations on their lips at Winnifred's first appearance in public since her marriage.

Had she dropped out of the world, as the Duchess of Hammersmith declared ? It did not look like it. Nor had she any intention of dropping out of the world, or of resigning her sceptre. On the contrary, the throne

was there ; she would ascend it and resume her old sway.

Seated on an ottoman in the centre of the large picture-gallery, she gave audience to her vassals, Dominic appearing now as Prince Consort, now as gentleman usher of her court. It pleased him more to see than it did her to receive all this attention. His pride in her was so great that there was no room for jealousy at all.

While half a dozen men were around her, none of whom he knew particularly well, he spied Guy Greatorex a little way off, seemingly hanging back from them. Dominic rushed up and captured him.

‘It’s months since I’ve seen you, old Guy. Why do you never come near us ?’

‘I’m not much of a lady’s man,’ replied the other, drily. ‘You should know that. Besides, your wife is too great a swell for me—she would not care to see me.’

‘The persons my wife prefers to see to any in the world are my particular friends,’ Dominic said gravely ; ‘and you can’t know

much about her, or you would not call her a swell.'

'I apologise. How do you think your picture looks by gaslight? It's rather a test. Let's go and see it.'

The old fellow wanted to change the conversation, and get out of danger.

'Come first and speak to my wife.'

'Does she want to speak to me?'

'What an old bear it is! Of course she does.'

'She seems fully occupied just now.'

'They're only acquaintances of old days. It's very civil of them to come and talk to her. Pleasant chaps enough, but not quite the companions for you and me, old Guy.'

'Do you know them? That Major Burton, for instance?'

'Yes; I know him slightly. He once did me a very good turn—years ago. And he's a very old friend of my wife's.'

'Did she tell you so?'

'Certainly,' said Dominic frankly. 'We have no secrets, of course. I know that he

admired her, and I'm not surprised. Who could help admiring her ?'

Guy Greatorex wondered whether she had told him all ; whether she had confessed how great had been her intimacy ; of the *tête-à-tête* rides at early morning in the park, and of other escapades which had given food for gossip two or three years back. But he forbore to question further.

' There's another man now, who was very devoted once, I believe—Captain FitzHugh. I hated him very cordially when I met him on top of the Alps. I thought he was preferred to me.'

' No great compliment to your own understanding,' growled Greatorex. ' FitzHugh's next door to a fool. But there's no harm in him ; not like that mincing *petit maître* Yellowborough.'

' Which is he ?'

' Dressed out like a mountebank as usual. He's just bowing to your wife.'

' How delightful to renew my acquaintance with Miss Forsyth,' said the æsthetic peer,

who might plead long absence in the South Seas in excuse of his ignorance of her new name. For the moment they were alone together.

‘I know that great minds cannot descend to details. Have you forgotten, Lord Yellowborough, or don’t you really know that I have changed my name?’

‘A fortune, I suppose?’

‘No; a much simpler and commoner process—a husband.’

‘Married! What a delightful surprise.’

‘I’m glad you’re pleased.’

‘I feel safe now; out of danger. I have been afraid to return, afraid I should have to ask you again and again—probably with the same results; constant rejection, unremitting and repeated agony and prostration of mind. Now I am spared all that. And may I presume so far as to enquire who is the happy man?’

Winnifred could not help smiling. This eccentric person was permitted much latitude in what he said and did.

‘A certain Dominic Gwynne. Have you heard of him?’

‘What does he do?—by daylight?’

‘Paints.’

‘What? carts, crockery, or black eyes?’

‘Pictures.’

‘An artist. How romantic. I hope he is a pauper; vowed to high art, which in these degenerate days no one appreciates. He does not condescend to exhibit, I hope?’

‘Very much so. He has a fine picture here on the line. I trust you will look at it.’

‘If you will show it me.’

‘With all my heart,’ Winnifred said frankly, as she got up and took his arm. ‘And afterwards I will introduce you to my husband.’

‘I’m too late on this occasion, you see,’ said Guy Greatorex. ‘Mrs. Gwynne has gone off on that little beast’s arm.’

‘Why do you call him names? Is there anything against him?’

‘He’s such a conceited, insufferable prig. Affects to despise all modern art; nothing

newer than the thirteenth century will do for him. To hear him talk you would fancy he had exhausted the whole knowledge of the world. But he is quite superficial ; a perfect humbug. Only a shallow prig.'

Greatorex spoke more severely perhaps than the occasion seemed to demand. But there was more below the surface. The worst feature in Lord Yellowborough, as others read him, was not his conceit. His reputation was none of the best ; where he became intimate, or paid marked attention, it boded no particular good for the lady he was pleased to prefer. All this, Greatorex, remembering old stories, and prone rather to distrust, knew full well, and therefore in his speech he was bitter against the dandified little peer.

But after all what business was it of his ? True ; he was sincerely attached to Dominic Gwynne, still prejudiced strongly in Winnifred's disfavour, and knowing what he knew about Lord Yellowborough, disliked and distrusted him thoroughly. Yet why should he take it for granted that harm must follow from this

renewal of an old acquaintance. A little consideration satisfied Greatorex that it was foolish to anticipate evil, ridiculous to harbour such thoughts, worse to put them into words.

Half-an-hour later Dominic and Greatorex were still together when Winnifred with Lord Yellowborough came up to them.

‘I’ve been looking for you everywhere, Dominic. Lord Yellowborough is most anxious to know you.’

Dominic bowed.

‘Mr. Gwynne, do not, I beg, consider it an impertinence if I assure you at once that I have the highest respect for your work.’

Lord Yellowborough spoke earnestly and with seeming sincerity. His manner was for the moment without affectation. He appeared to be full of genuine esteem.

‘You are very good, Lord Yellowborough,’ replied Dominic, with some dignity, but with evident pleasure. Few men are insensible to judicious praise—artists least of all.

‘There are qualities in it which are exceedingly rare in these days. Reserve,

coupled with fixity of intention, a nice fastidiousness of expression, and marvellous technical power. Believe me, you have in you the stuff of which great painters are made.'

'That's good news,' cried Winnifred gaily. To praise her husband was a sure passport to her favour. She frowned, therefore, when Greatorex said abruptly—

'You will turn his head, Yellowborough. He means well, but he is idle, injudicious, too regardless of public taste.'

'He is in advance of it; he hopes to lead it, not to be a slave to it,' said Winnifred, turning upon Greatorex at once, and looking at him as much as to say, Who are you who dare to criticise Dominic Gwynne ?

Old Guy shrugged his shoulders and forbore to reply. It was not that he had not the courage of his opinions, but rather that he despised his antagonist, and declined to argue with her.

'The general level of public taste is deplorably low,' said Lord Yellowborough, taking up his parable: 'All honour to those who

labour to raise it. I can conceive of no higher ambition, and I congratulate you sincerely, Mr. Gwynne, upon your lofty aims.'

'Psha!' said Greatorex rather contemptuously. 'There's too much cant about lofty aims. Let a man turn out good honest work which tells its own story, without trying to soar over people's heads.'

'There are not many who make the effort. Look round here : ' and Lord Yellowborough rapidly reckoned up the leading painters of the day, and summarily disposed of them.

'Here we see vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself; the frantic presumption which strives to rival the ancient giants, and, dealing with great scriptural episodes without one spark of deep religious reverential feeling, lies grovelling still in the muddy mixtures it calls paint. These feeble photographers asking us to believe that their mechanical processes in portraiture approximate to the true ideal representation of the human face or form divine. This man's humour never rises above low-bred jocosity ; the laugh it evokes is a

snigger or a grin such as modern playgoers enjoy when they listen to and can comprehend the puns of a burlesque ; that man's vaunted simplicity verges upon shallowness, and his work is counted truthful because it is too easily understood. We ask for bread and they give us a stone ; for thoughts elevating and ennobling, and we get cheap pathos and fustian sentiment ; for luminous living flesh painting only wood. Modern drapery is made by the ironmonger ; the atmosphere might be sold in a cook-shop for pea soup. I am absolutely sickened by what I see. Such foetid monstrosities, such abjectly artificial monstrosities, such mawkish unhealthy sentimentalities. And to call these things pictures. Faugh !'

' You have not lost your fine command of metaphor, your thorough mastery over your mother tongue, I observe,' said Winnifred with a smile.

' Nor your prejudices,' added Greatorex with a sneer. ' Your taste still lies, I presume, in the direction of the spasmodic school.

Fire and frenzy, rolling eyes, the wild contortions of dancing dervishes, the passionate energy of the witches in *Macbeth*, heated emotions depicted in lurid colour with wild exaggeration of drawing and effect. I know your tendencies, Yellowborough, of old.'

'Pardon me, I have no prejudices. I am superior to them. I ask only for excellence, for purity of intention, for seriousness, for thoughtfulness of execution and design, whereby the painter endeavours to convey to us more than we see with our eyes, and teaches an inner greater truth, arousing our highest and finest feelings, and making us better men.'

Greatorex's sneer was renewed. He was disgusted to hear such high-flown rhapsodies upon the lips of such a man as Lord Yellowborough.

'But I despair—or I did despair—for English art, until I had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Gwynne.' He made Dominic a small bow, and went on: 'I look to you and men of your stamp—would there were

more of you, men with the courage to try and the genius to succeed—I look to you to retrieve the fallen fortunes of English art. Truly now in this nineteenth century it is at a deplorably low ebb.'

'How do you account for it?' Winnifred asked. 'There are undoubtedly many men of power amongst us.'

'I don't deny it. But they are handed over body and soul to money. The commercial spirit has entered into them; they are mere tradesmen with no thoughts beyond boiling the pot. They would rather, as has been well said, live by art than for art. Give me the man that thinks of his future fame rather than the present market price of his work.'

'Admirable in theory,' said Dominic with a smile. 'And if there were now available quiet retreats, hermitage or monastery, where a man might live secluded with no distracting thoughts, it might be advantageous for some phases of English art. But it would lose the great mainspring of human sympathy, the

domestic affections, the cheerfulness of home, the happiness of one's own belongings.'

He looked fixedly and meaningly at Winnifred, who thereupon took up her parable.

'Your talk, Lord Yellowborough, is too high falutin', as the Yankees say.'

'If Dominic lived only for art, how should we pay the butcher and the baker? You must not put these notions into his head. He is a little too apt already to subordinate his worldly prosperity to his ideal yearnings. To-morrow when I want him to go on with his new picture he will quote you against me, and tell me the true artist must not be hurried, and that he should be above painting for the pot.'

'He would be right. I honour him for it,' cried Lord Yellowborough, ecstatically. 'But have you anything important in hand, Mr. Gwynne, or am I indiscreet in asking?'

'Come and give us your advice, Lord Yellowborough,' Winnifred said with much heartiness. 'There's a fine picture in contemplation. Dominic has been pondering

over it for months, and he is waiting, I think, for encouragement to begin. It is, I think, a grand theme.'

'Really,' said Guy Greatorex, roused suddenly to great interest in spite of himself, 'I had no notion or inkling of anything of the kind.'

'How should you? You never come near us,' Winnifred replied very coldly.

'I am a wretched misanthrope.'

'Say misogynist, rather.'

'I never go out into society.'

'Nor do we. We receive and visit only our intimate friends.'

Winnifred as she spoke thought of what the Duchess of Hammersmith had said, and had already formed the idea of extending the circle of her acquaintance, just to prove that her Grace was wrong.

'Some day, I trust, I may be included in that select number,' said Lord Yellowborough, simpering.

'Certainly,' Dominic and Winnifred re-

plied in the same breath. 'We shall be glad to see you whenever you care to call.'

'And you, too, Mr. Greatorex,' Winnifred went on, looking him straight in the face, and giving him her hand.

Guy was not quite won over, but he accepted the terms offered, signing at least an armistice or truce, if not a permanent peace. And he wished now to visit at The Farm, if it was only to watch over Lord Yellowborough, and see that that lax nobleman really meant no harm.

CHAPTER V.

THE Duchess of Hammersmith had been pleased to say that the painter's wife had lost caste by her marriage ; that she no longer enjoyed the same social status ; that she was exiled from the paradise of fashion to which she had once as of right belonged. It might be so ; yet within a year or two of their settlement in town, Winnifred was established as a leader of society, a queen having an extensive kingdom with limits that reached beyond the upper ten thousand, and embraced all manner of men.

That she had drifted into this was to be accounted for in more ways than one. Those who still disliked her—not, it must be confessed, a very numerous band—attributed it to inevitable backsliding. The old habit was reasserting itself they said. She was of

the world, worldly, a frivolous pleasure-seeking woman, whose feverish thirst for excitement nothing but a continual whirl of excitement could assuage.

Guy Greatorex was one of the loudest of these. He had always laughed to scorn the notion that she would settle down permanently into a quiet hum-drum life. In the first blush of married happiness she might pretend to prefer it; but such abnegation could not be expected to endure for long. He had given her but twelve months. What if 'abstention' had lasted a little longer? The relapse had come, as it had been anticipated. Already was she launched into the old grooves. Very soon she would be known and be notorious as one of the fastest and gayest matrons of the town.

But Greatorex and men who thought with him were wrong. Winnifred re-entered society more on her husband's account than her own. Possibly she was not entirely free from that desire to be feted, followed, and made much of, which in a greater or lesser

degree is the natural heritage of every daughter of Eve, but the motive power now was less personal vanity than pride in another. It was the intense, deep-seated pride in her husband which impelled her to seek popularity, to wish to be seen at the best houses, to entertain the best people, and keep open house at her own. She was eager to prove that Dominic Gwynne was as good as the greatest, the noblest, the best. She gloried in the honour of being his wife, and wanted all the world to honour him too.

And the success she craved for came easily and quickly enough. The Farm soon became favourably and pleasantly known. People gathered round her only too readily.

By degrees she found herself occupying the position she had promised herself as a compensation for marrying Mr. Crammersh, the billionaire. Her home was the rallying spot and centre for the cream of the London world. Hither came those whom the chance of birth had put at the top of the social tree; others who had worked their way up to the

topmost branches by sheer persistence, climbing by force of brains and strong right hands. Her visitors and guests were of all colours and complexions. High and low, old friends and new. The *jeunesse dorée* rubbed shoulders with Bohemians of the most ragged description. Frock coats and hats shiny with oil were seen side by side with wide-awakes and velveteen jackets. The polished phrases of Belgravian *précièuses* struggled with the rough and ready *argot* and technical talk of various 'shops.'

Here, on common ground, met two extremes. Authors and their critics, artists and their patrons, actors and the audiences they charmed. Here you saw Highstairs the great tragedian, who earned his thousands, and George Jinks the low comedy music-hall singer, who made people laugh when he winked or sneezed, or took off his hat; Goater the art critic with his pale hair and mild blue eyes, whose good word was worth untold gold to the young painter, and who knew, himself, as much about art as he

did about the internal mechanism of an iron-clad. Cripps, the 'special' of the 'Daily Torch,' an iron man, who wrote letters in the saddle going full gallop or under the fire of Gatlings and *mitrailleuses*, came to The Farm in the intervals of leisure, when one war was, but just concluded and another not properly begun.

Hither Beau Burton, who had long since made his peace with Winnifred, brought his princelet, and displayed his Royal Highness freely and without charge to those who had never seen a Royalty in their lives before. The prince was quite as much pleased to see them—especially the ladies, many of whom were of different types from those encountered in great drawing-rooms or at State balls. Among them were the learned ladies who lectured upon woman's rights and talked openly on subjects tabooed even in the smoking-rooms of clubs; the scientific ladies who talked about the sun's corona, the tasimeter, and the telephone; the ladies with diplomas as doctors of medicine or law, ready to cure anything,

from a toothache to the world at large. Actresses came too ; arriving and making their bow with that ease and finish which can only be acquired to perfection before the footlights, and assuming immediately they bowed to the prince the part of first lady of the court, playing it with fidelity, according to their traditions, until they left the house. There were lady novelists, with outward appearance often in curious contrast to the gorgeous scenes they described ; lady painters, again, who wore their hair short, and laughed all lovers to scorn.

Not that ladies were over plentiful at Winnifred's parties. Such as those I have enumerated appeared without fail, and with them a sprinkling of old cronies and acquaintances of girlhood. But I fear, like other women of her sort, she had no strong predilection for, and therefore scarcely encouraged, her own sex. She did not welcome them always as warmly as she might have done, and always infinitely preferred the society of men. That old coquetry of hers was not to be

quenched. Still harmless and thoughtless, it was now a thousandfold more insinuating and attractive in the matron than in the maid.

She daily increased her empire, daily swelled the number of slaves and vassals at her feet. The members of the Zeuxis Club had sworn allegiance to her nearly to a man ; stout henchmen all of them, enthusiastic champions and supporters who would have laid their coats upon the ground and themselves inside them had Winnifred wished to tread them under foot. Many old admirers, too, whose old regard had survived the affronts and injuries of their rejection, were glad of a chance of basking in the sunlight of her presence once again.

Big Bobby FitzHugh was one of these. He had returned from India, cured, as he thought, of his hurts, and boldly faced Winnifred as if daring her to do him harm. It was all over with him, of course, the moment he clapped eyes on her. The same sweet look, the same winning voice, the same air of friendly patronage tempered now by a mock

demureness, due to her new *rôle*, all these were irresistible. Although he felt a fool for his pains, he kept continually hanging about her, devoted as of yore, but humble and patient, taking quite kindly, as dogs do blows from their masters, the quips and sharp but good-humoured raillery he endured at her and her friends' hands.

For, as a general rule, he was quite out of his element in the company he found at The Farm—either a mile behind in the conversation or altogether astray in the topics introduced. The young soldier had passed his days as do many other young soldiers ; in the cultivation rather of his moustaches and of the graces than of his brains. In a studio when the talk turned upon contemporary art, or making one of a party when politics came upon the *tapis*, or yet, again, when the literary workmanship of 'Middlemarch' was discussed, or the qualities of Irving's interpretation of Hamlet, he was like a ship in a fog.'

'Have you got "What Will he do with

It?" someone asked Winnifred one day at lunch.

'Certainly. I have had it ever so long. I've got them all.'

Bobby opened his eyes. He was puzzled. What could it be? He wondered whether it was catching; why it did not show itself outwardly, whether she would have it much longer, whether it was beyond all cure.

'Will you lend it me?' went on the enquirer.

'Of course; keep it as long as you like.'

That was kind of her, Bobby thought. No doubt she was glad to be well rid of it. The soldier was impressed with her sagacity, wished he could also lend or make away with any complaint which attacked him.

'What copy is yours?'

'The original in four volumes.'

'Oh, it's a book!' cried Bobby aloud, in a voice of deep thankfulness and relief.

'To be sure; what did you think it was?'

‘Don’t know. Thought it was something you caught.’

‘Salmon, perhaps ; or cricket balls ?’

‘No, but things. Illnesses—measles, croup, mumps.’

‘What will you do with it ?’ he repeated, as if to remember the name.

‘Read it, of course,’ cried Winnifred ; ‘that’s what one generally does with a book.’

‘I don’t know about that,’ said Cripps the correspondent. ‘More people in these days write books than read them.’

‘Deuced odd name for a book,’ went on Bobby, clinging to his original line of thought, which was much easier to him than following out a new one.

‘Who wrote it ? Never heard of it.’

‘Why, Bulwer Lytton, of course.’

‘Never heard of him. There’s a Miss Litton ; she acts.’

‘And Lord Lytton, in India. He’s the son.’

‘Sun !’ cried Bobby, more bewildered than ever. ‘Sun ! In India ?’

‘Come, come,’ said good-natured Dominic interposing, anxious to withdraw his guest from the increasing fire of chaff. ‘You know Bulwer Lytton, I’m sure; you’ve heard of “Eugene Aram,” “Ernest Maltravers,” “Paul Clifford.”’

‘Paul Clifford! To be sure, I know him well enough. Why, he’s in the Prancers. A particular friend of mine. I met him at Kurrachee last year, on my way home from the “Shiny.”’

‘And there are the plays,’ went on Winnifred, determined to give Bobby rope. ‘“Money,” you’ve seen that?’

‘Money, whose? Not my own. Haven’t had any for ever so long.’

‘You gave it all to that cabman who brought you down here this morning.’

‘No! really I only gave him thirty shillings. He said it was eleven miles——’

This raised a shout. The fare was certainly a little extravagant.

‘You ought to see the “Lady of Lyons,”’ said Winnifred, returning to the charge.

‘I will if you say so ; but it’s a long way to go——’

‘Come and have a cigarette, FitzHugh,’ said Dominic, getting up, but laughing in spite of himself.

He liked the simple captain, who had once seemed so formidable a rival ; liked him much. Jealousy did not enter into Dominic’s composition. His loyal trustfulness of Winnifred in the first place forbade it. In the second, it seemed so natural that all who came within reach of her influence should thereupon fall down and worship her, as he did himself.

In the same way, although he infinitely preferred Bobby FitzHugh’s straightforward and unaffected ways to the mincing, simpering affectations of Lord Yellowborough, Dominic also tolerated the æsthetic peer, who had come by degrees to be quite a standing dish at The Farm.

Lord Yellowborough, on the other hand, was devoted to Dominic ; deferring to him perpetually, patting him on the back with

honeyed phrase, and giving the young painter to understand how highly his genius was esteemed and admired.

‘He’s far too civil to be wholesome,’ Guy Greatorex growled, when he paid a visit to The Farm and found his lordship ensconced always in a snug corner of the studio, and installed as the friend of the house. With native suspicion old Guy was inclined to believe that Lord Yellowborough thus systematically sang Dominic’s praise only to find favour in Winnifred’s eyes.

But his lordship did not only commend at The Farm. Elsewhere, up and down the town, he was for ever loud in his eulogies of the Gwynnes.

‘They’re the nicest people I ever met in my life,’ he cried one day as he talked to the Duchess of Hammersmith at her own house. Then he screwed his eyeglass into his eye to watch the effect of the announcement. Winnifred had told him of the feud, and his speech was somewhat maliciously meant.

‘You always take up with the oddest

creatures ; it was you who introduced that singing man from the London music-halls, and made him so popular.

‘ He is not to be spoken of in the same century as the Gwynnes. Gwynne is the greatest genius England has seen since Turner ; his wife is the most beautiful and attractive woman who has lived since the days of Madame de Staël. Their children are all cherubs, their cottage is a gem of art, their parties the most delightful it is possible to conceive. They’re the success of London, of the season, of the age. I know nothing —have never known anything like them.’

‘ You might have been paid by the hour, Lord Yellowborough. But you’re not a trustworthy witness. You’ve long been captured, I know, and enslaved.’

‘ I mean what I say, duchess ; the few pleasant hours I spend in this wilderness are at Mrs. Gwynne’s.’

‘ She can make herself very fascinating to men, no doubt. That is sufficiently well known,’ said the duchess, with a sniff.

‘That I grant ; but the success of her parties is not due altogether to herself. She is the principal figure—the sun, the centre and life of the system—encouraging, controlling, directing the satellites who move around her ; but these contribute their quota to the general result. The success is achieved by the people she gets together.’

‘They’re what one sees, I suppose, everywhere else. The world’s a small one, more’s the pity ; and there are not many men and women in it—of the sort one cares to meet.’

‘You never made a greater mistake. They are all new and different people at Mrs. Gwynne’s. Strange, unknown beings ; at least strange to you. You have only read about them, duchess.’

‘Not gorillas, I hope ?’

‘Related to them, of course, as we all are. But these are mostly very superior apes. Last Sunday Kingscote was there.’

‘Captain Kingscote, the explorer ?’

‘The man himself. Came to The Farm

directly he got back from Nova Zembla to tell all his news.'

'Why, he's the most difficult man to catch in London.'

'And Highstairs, of the Empress Theatre.'

'Not really; and I'd heard he would not go anywhere. The Savernakes got him to stay once over Sunday; but they took him straight from the theatre in a coach-and-four last thing on Saturday night, and brought him back the same way on Monday afternoon.'

'And Mrs. Mountjoy—last time she read us part of the manuscript of her new novel.'

'How deeply interesting. Then there is some amusement?'

'*Some!* It's the very best fun I know. You hear the most exquisite music. The Strolling Minstrels come on by nights and play concerted pieces, the Crow and Nightingall Glee Clubs sing there once a fortnight. One night at supper we had recitations from Stuart Macnish, comic songs by a Cabinet Minister, a clog dance by a physician to the

Queen. A new sermon set to music by Madame Clothilde, of Covent Garden. Sometimes we have disputations, sometimes charades, sometimes fireworks, sometimes we all stand in a row on chairs and blow penny whistles, or play on tooth-combs and tongs—you never saw such fun in your life.' Lord Yellowborough finished with a gasp for breath.

'I really must go to one of these parties,' said the duchess.

'I think you really ought. There is only one drawback.'

'Yes? Nothing insurmountable, I hope.'

'Nothing more than that you won't be asked. Mrs. Gwynne hates even the sound of your name.'

'She ought to be flattered by my expressing a wish to go to her house.'

'That is not her sort at all. She is not likely to be flattered if all the crowned heads in Europe offered to come and dine and bring their wives. She might like to see Cetewayo; but that's different.'

‘Well, I don’t care about being asked in set form—I can go without an invitation.’

The duchess was quite capable of it.

‘Yes, do ; only let me know the day, and I’ll make a point of being there to meet you.’

Lord Yellowborough saw the chance of an amusing scene.

‘What’s the best day to go ?’

‘Sunday.’

‘Dear me !’ cried the duchess, rather staggered. ‘That’s awkward——’

‘Surely you have no old-fashioned prejudices about Sunday and Sabbath-breaking ? I can remember how you used to——’

‘Hush, hush. Since Millicent married the Bishop it is necessary to respect appearances of that sort. I never go out on Sundays now. Never take out the horses——’ They were jobbed, and it was so much cheaper to have them one day less in each week. ‘I don’t even go to the Zoo; but then no one else does.’

‘I do. I was there a week or two ago, and I found it crowded.’

‘But not with anybody one knows? Only tradesmen, and the lower orders generally? I *do* dislike, excessively, mixing with people of that sort.’

‘That’s natural enough. You would not care, I suppose, to meet the duke’s tailor in private life, or Mrs. Dobbs, who dresses you, or the cheesemonger and fishmonger and all that lot?’

‘Oh dear no, of course not. Would any of them be at Mrs. Gwynne’s?’

‘Scarcely,’ said Lord Yellowborough with a smile. ‘You might meet Worth, perhaps, or any celebrity, but only a celebrity. We are all more or less celebrities at The Farm.’

‘They must indeed be amusing parties. Perhaps for once and a way I might yield a point about Sunday.’

‘I thought you would not find it an insurmountable obstacle.’

‘Well, not exactly. Besides, I think I *must* go to Mrs. Gwynne’s, and the sooner the better. Next Sunday, say. Where is Pedlar’s Green?’

Lord Yellowborough gave the duchess full particulars, and then went off to put Winnifred on her guard.

These Sundays at The Farm had grown to be quite an institution. It was the only day in the week on which a large section of Winnifred's friends were free to visit her ; the journalists, for instance, and the actors to whom Sunday was a holiday in something more than in name. It is visiting day moreover to the best part of the London world ; a day of rest again for the hard-working, and for the idle a naturally dull day, the tedium of which they are glad to relieve.

Nothing particular was done at The Farm on these days, but the talk was always good, the company invariably amusing. In fine weather the gardens were filled, in wet or wintry seasons the visitors wandered freely all over the house, or gathered together in the magnificent studio, which Dominic had recently built, and which Winnifred made her chief reception room. No queen could have owned a better. Although plainly furnished

—walls painted in distemper, on the floor a simple matting, the chairs many of them straw-backed, the sofas and lounges of ordinary stuff—it was so vast in its proportions, so lofty, light, and airy, that it might have been the throne room of a palace. And here and there were many choice possessions, old oak cabinets, armour, tapestry, good china jars, and large plates of Rhodian ware, above all, scraps and bits from Dominic's own hand, the first idea of the 'Lotos Eaters,' numberless other 'motifs' merely indicated or roughly rubbed in. Many other canvases, moreover, not on view all of them, although some few were framed and finished, and chief of all, at this particular juncture, was the great work last taken in hand, of which we shall hear more anon, but which still was kept with its back to the wall.

In this studio, near the ingle-nook of the spacious fire-place of red marble and black tiles, was Winnifred seated, surrounded by her friends, the day that the duchess, uninvited, did her the honour to call at The Farm.

At the first news of the expected visit Winnifred had waxed hotly indignant, and had declared that nothing could induce her to receive the Duchess of Hammersmith at all. Her Grace should be sent about her business *instanter*, and the house denied her. She should be told that Winnifred was at home, but not to her. Then as the matter was more and more discussed among the intimate friends who came to The Farm, it was thought that some more severe punishment ought to overtake the duchess for her impertinence. She would richly deserve some salutary lesson which should teach her not to offend in the same way again. But what should the lesson be, and how should it be administered ?

Bobby FitzHugh, with that exuberant imagination for which he was famed, suggested the horsepond ; but he was told he was not now at school or in barracks. Beau Burton clung also to the practical joke notion ; his experiences in certain high circles having lain very much in that line. Dominic, good-natured and easy-going, suggested that the

duchess should be received with the most effusive affection ; to pile coals of fire on her head would be at the same time magnanimous and very irksome to her. Winnifred herself was for using the weapons she had at command, cool irony amounting to rudeness, and contemptuous semi-politeness, which ought to make the intruder thoroughly uncomfortable. But none of these plans would do.

‘The duchess is invulnerable to snubbing,’ said Yellowborough. ‘She would never admit that you had got the better of her. The cooler you were the more affectionate she would become. No, it must be something peculiar to give her a pang. I’ll tell you what—Suppose—’

But when pressed he declared he could only propound his scheme privately to Winnifred.

The Sunday following was by no means a warm day, although the spring was already far advanced. Most of Winnifred’s visitors, therefore, preferred the studio to the garden, and the room was nearly as full as so large a

place could be at the moment the Duchess of Hammersmith arrived.

She was announced by the butler—not a permanent official—and she had been, not ruffled, because so serene a personage was not easily put out, but just a little vexed at meeting that particular man face to face. He had been in her service once, and she had done her best to ruin him, turning him adrift without a character on some unfounded charge. But he had invoked the law against her, and had won his case. The trial had revealed many of the little shifts of the ducal *ménage*, and had shown up her Grace in no favourable light, much to the satisfaction of the weekly press, which in glowing periods had torn her to shreds.

Hence the duchess hated the sight of the man most cordially, and seemed to detect a gleam of triumph in his eyes as he went forward to announce the duchess upstairs.

Her Grace was most cordial and affectionate to Winnifred.

‘Oh, my dear Mrs. Gwynne, I have been promising this pleasure for ever so long.’

‘So have I, duchess, and so have my friends,’ Winnifred said rather enigmatically, ‘at least for the last hour.’

‘I have been expected then?’

‘Certainly. Lord Yellowborough told me you intended to honour me with a visit, and we have prepared a little surprise for you. Will you come near the fire, duchess? If you will sit down, the performance will begin.’

‘A performance? On Sunday? Dear me, Mrs. Gwynne.’

‘Only an address, and a collection afterwards for purely proselytising purposes. You understand.’

‘To be sure. A missionary meeting. I shall be delighted to assist, of course. I take the deepest interest in all such things.’

But her face fell rather. After having heard so much of the amusements at The Farm to be let in for a sermon and a collection. The latter was the worst feature in the affair,

for she felt she must give a proper ducal contribution. It was a little too much.

However, the duchess took her seat near Winnifred with a semi-devotional air, and the address began,

The lecturer or preacher was a fierce black-bearded man with staring eyes and white prominent teeth; a wolfish-looking man, who might have worn the *bonnet rouge* and cried 'Down with the aristocrats' in the Reign of Terror.

'He has lived so much among the savages, I suppose,' said the duchess to Winnifred, by way of apologising for the lecturer's unprepossessing appearance.

'Yes, in New Caledonia. They fattened him up for food once, quite on scientific principles, like they do the geese at Strasbourg.'

'How extraordinary!'

'But he turned the tables on them, and ate them instead. He tells me he quite got to like the diet. Quite misses it now.'

‘Ugh! he looks like it,’ cried the duchess, who had never seen a real cannibal before.

‘But—sh! He is going to begin.’

If the duchess had expected some account of the great work in New Caledonia, she was doomed to be disappointed.

The lecturer, who spoke with a strong foreign accent, commenced by reading a long extract from Comte, and then launched forth into a semi-mystical semi-metaphysical discourse, which was difficult to follow and almost impossible to understand.

The duchess, therefore, after struggling hard to keep her attention fixed to the subject, at last gave it up, and sought relief in staring at the people round her.

All strangers of course. No; surely that is a familiar face. To be sure. It was that horrid Dr. Goodchild, a well-known London physician, whom she had once honoured by consulting, going to his house disguised, among the poor people to whom he gave advice gratuitously. The doctor had detected

her, however, and had given her a bit of his mind on her meanness.

And there—gracious goodness ! It was Mr. Hawley, the eminent dentist, a set of whose brilliant enamel she had at that moment in her mouth, but for which she had forgotten so far to pay.

Any more ?

Worse and worse. Mrs. Dobbs, the court milliner, to whom she owed hundreds, and with whom she had quarrelled more than once over discount and materials supplied.

Stobber, the coach-builder, too, who had dragged her, a duchess, into the County Court, and recovered a large sum which she had refused distinctly to pay.

Were these Mrs. Gwynne's intimate friends ? Did they come to the house by mere accident, the chance callers on a Sunday afternoon ? Then the duchess remembered the butler, who was her enemy, and felt that the whole affair was a plot, a deep-laid plot, from beginning to end.

Her first impulse was to get up and leave

the house at once. Then she thought such a step would be too marked. It was before everything necessary that she should preserve her composure. It would not do to turn tail. She would hear this man out, and then——

But what was he saying ?

‘ What then are the uses of an hereditary aristocracy ? Do they serve for ornament, for instruction, for edification ? They are no more ornament upon the face of this earth than the paint and powder upon the cheek of a foolish belle. They instruct and edify us only by their loathsome example, as the drunken slave warned the Spartan lads against the crime of excess. They are the rotten and effete remnants of a putrescent past ; they were born of corruption, nourished on rapacity ; they have been kept alive by the hideous oppression of their fellow-men. But their cup is nearly full. The time approaches fast when their downfall shall be decreed, when they shall be despoiled of their ill-gotten riches, when the brand shall be applied to their palaces, when their acres shall be for-

feited for the general good, and they themselves, with all their forbears and belongings, shall be sold into bondage, the bondage of menial service, the obligation to earn the bread they eat with their own hard-handed toil. This is the crusade I preach. It is to further this great cause, to compass the speedy extinction of a class which, like a reptile, has its fangs in the flesh of the suffering people, to throw down the brass idols of a vain, useless, idle, and pernicious aristocracy, that I am speaking to you. It is to contribute to this great end that I shall, at its conclusion, entreat of you to give of your abundance. Funds for the great work are urgently needed, and in such a good cause who could refuse to give ?'

‘ May I ask you to send for a cab ? ’ said the duchess haughtily to Winnifred. ‘ I cannot listen to this any longer. I fear I have been led into a trap.’

Winnifred with a meaning smile said, ‘ Pardon me, duchess. You have entered it willingly. I am sorry M. Anatole Ambigu’s

views do not meet with your approbation. But you will, I think, remember that I did not ask you to——'

‘Anatole Ambigu! The Communist who escaped only the other day from the French penal settlements. Have I been listening to that wretch whose crimes——’

He is now listening to *you*, duchess, and you know, such are his cannibal longings, that I think you had better not anger him.’

‘I never was in such a house in my life before. May I entreat you again, Mrs. Gwynne, to have a cab called for me?’

‘You did not come in your own carriage? I am afraid cabs are not easy to find down here on a Sunday afternoon. But Huggings shall go. You remember Huggings perhaps. Your old butler. He would do anything for you.’

The cab was called for, but all in vain.

‘I daresay we can find you a conveyance, duchess. Most of my friends walk or use the Underground. But Mrs. Dobbs came in

her carriage. You know Mrs. Dobbs. No? Not Mrs. Dobbs, of Regent Street. She will be charmed. I will introduce you.'

'No, no; anything but that.'

'Here is Dr. Goodchild. Will you give the duchess a seat?'

'Certainly, but I must visit a number of patients before I return to London.'

'There is Lord Yellowborough's drag.'

'A coach-and-four on Sunday.'

'Yes, and quite at your service, duchess. Do let me have the honour of escorting you to London.'

Beset by so many difficulties, the poor Duchess of Hammersmith preferred to cling to one of her own order, and although she had grave misgivings as to the propriety of the course she was about to pursue, got on the box beside Lord Yellowborough, and was driven home, through the park and by all the most frequented thoroughfares, greatly to her own discomfiture, but much to the delight of the charioteer.

She never went again to Pedlar's Green.

CHAPTER VI.

PEDLAR'S GREEN had many means of communication with the great city of which it was the humble outlet and suburb. The omnibuses traversed it from end to end, a tram-car ran as far as vested interests would suffer it, and within half a mile was a steamboat-pier which brought the Thames and the river traffic conveniently near.

But by far the most popular, the cheapest, and most rapid method of locomotion was the underground railway. This was largely patronised, and at all hours of the day, by the denizens of Pedlar's Green. Soon after daybreak the workmen's trains were filled with citizens and mechanics, not only English, but French and Germans, and even Chinese, who found in Pedlar's Green fresh air and moderate rents; next came

troops of shop-assistants, male and female, and inferior clerks who dwelt in those parts for the same reason, but whom the distance compelled to travel betimes in order to put in an appearance at 'business' exactly as the clock struck nine ; later appeared people of a higher grade, some few men in Government offices, well-to-do tradesmen, heads of firms or partners thereof, whose hours of work did not begin till ten ; after these, the early birds for whom the worms in town were waiting, had flocked citywards, there was a lull upon the line till the time came for idlers or the independent folk, who went to London only for their pleasure ; with them were intermixed the wives and daughters, the frugal housewives bent on bargains at their favourite shops, the girls bound to make morning calls, the children on their way to masters or to school ; and thus was maintained an intermittent variable stream, till presently, as evening drew on, it gained volume and set strongly westward, carrying the breadwinners home. Their day's toil was at an end.

Last of all, at nightfall travelling up, and at midnight travelling down, trooped the play-goers and the gadabouts bound to pit or stall and early dance, who, fortified against all ills by homely golosh or charitable Ulster covering many sins, crowded the carriages and filled every echo with forecasts of coming joys or noisy prospects of the amusements at which they had assisted that night.

It was a cold March evening, chill and drear, the street slushy with a drizzling rain, when Mrs. Mudge descended the station steps, and entered the foggy, dimly-lighted tunnel to wait upon the platform for the Pedlar's Green train.

‘Lor ! Mrs. Simkins,’ she cried, as soon as her eyes became accustomed to the murky light ; ‘lor, who’d have thought of seeing you here ? Have you been in town a shopping ? I have.’

There was no doubt of it. The good matron was heavy laden with her purchases. An odd collection, truly. Some she carried in

her hands, or under her arms ; others lay on the wooden seat, ready to be hastily pitch forked into the train when it arrived. Among other things she had a ' bowler ' hat for her second son, unmistakable in shape although done up in brown paper ; two muffins, easily made out through their thin wrapper ; a long bottle, also self-asserting : of the remaining parcels the most prominent were a pair of child's boots, a packet of tea, and a plethoric, very tightly-packed bag.

A shrewd, motherly body was Mrs. Mudge, very dexterous in household management, homely and goodnatured, with a pleasant kindly face, which wrinkled only into a frown when her prejudices were trodden on or her sense of the proprieties assailed.

' Nice goings on our way last Sunday,' continued Mrs. Mudge. "'Aven't you 'erd ? well I never. It's the talk of all the Green. These Gwynnes again.'

' Oh ! ' said Mrs. Simkins, with a toss of her head. ' I expected as much. What now ? I counted as many as fourteen car-

riages myself, and there was a coach with four horses——'

‘A drag, I presume.’ Mrs. Simkins aspired to superior society knowledge. Her husband painted the portraits of a certain second-rate aristocracy, and as such had obtained an insight into the mysteries not known to the general public.

‘On a Sunday, too! it passes everything,’ said Mrs. Mudge. ‘It is a disgrace to the whole neighbourhood—such doings. And to bring home a pack of play-acting men and women, who call themselves artists, and riff-raff of all sorts.’

‘Some one said that Prince Ferdinand was there, and the Duchess of Hammersmith—not that I believed it.’

‘Duchess indeed; why last Sunday they were all tradespeople. I saw them myself.’

‘What, did you go too, Mrs. Mudge?’

‘I enter that house! never again. Not but what I was ready enough to hold out the olive-branch when she came first to our parts, but it was not well received. I thought I

would tell her about Moggs the fishmonger who robbed us all. I recommended her a washerwoman—my own, in fact—but Mrs. Gwynne, if you please, did not approve of the way the linen was got up. I spoke to her about coals; I advised her to try nuts and coke mixed; but she told me she left all that to the cook. But I suppose she don't need to worry about money. She was an heiress, I've heard tell.'

‘Don’t you believe it?’

‘But look at the prices he gets. My Marmaduke tells me Christison gives him a blank cheque for a 27×42 , and he can have as many wood blocks as he likes to draw upon.’

‘It won’t last. It never does. He went up like a skyrocket, and he’ll come down like the stick. And with the life they lead, and the money they spend, where will they be if bad times come?’

‘Before that he’ll be in the Academy. They say he’s certain to be one of the next Associates——’

‘Dominic Gwynne an Associate?’ almost

shrieked Mrs. Simkins. 'At his age! and he not having exhibited half a dozen pictures, and what he does no good. It'll be a scandalous shame.'

She was thinking of her patient Simkins, who had drudged year after year, always on tenterhooks about his pictures, sometimes skied, sometimes floored, and sometimes rejected altogether.

'It's she who is doing it. She's as deep, that woman, as—it's she who gets all these people down to her place. She makes up to the R.A.'s, and toadies them. Hardly a day passes but what she has one of them to dine. I saw Mr. Melladew in the Green the other day coming out of their house.'

'Ah! well. They may find it more than they can compass. Housekeeping's not what it used to be, and she's no manager. They'll be in Short Street—mark my words—before they've done with it. Carriages and horses and dinner parties, and all off one man's brush! It's more than anyone can stand. They'll be ruined yet.'

The generalisations of the astute matron, who had passed through the fire of narrow means, were not in reality very wide of the mark. Ruin might be too strong a word, but embarrassment was not. The Gwynnes were just on the verge of the unpleasant discovery that they were living beyond their means. No doubt they were in good company. It is the fashion to outrun the constable as it is to wear high heels and deal at co-operative stores. The game of brag is carried on by nearly all alike. Everyone wishes to show off, to ape the same manners, live in the same style. If your neighbours keep a French cook, we must get *entrées* from the pastrycook's ; if they drive in a victoria or landau, we must get a brougham from the livery stables, with a bogus crest which we pretend is our own. There was no effort of ostentation in the Gwynne *ménage*, but they had slipped into extravagance almost unconsciously, by doing what others did—and just a little more.

Matters were not mended at the moment

by the condition of the money market and of investments generally. The period was one of despondency, increasing to panic. Distrust, which commenced in misgivings as to the solvency of foreign borrowers, was followed by such a sudden depreciation in securities that the collapse of many seemed inevitable. Just at this time the Royal Commission, called into existence by Sir Henry James, sat with open doors, and like a financial Gatling kept up a murderous fire against offending stocks. Chilis, Hungarians, Egyptians, Argentines, Perus, went down like ninepins, and looked as if they would never recover. Holders' hearts failed them for fear. The calm dispassionate mind, which meets such crises with cool stoicism, and plucks triumph out of seeming disaster, is a rare gift. For one who stood firm while their fortunes dwindled, a thousand cried Ichabod, and fell into absolute despair.

Colonel Forsyth was one of the latter class. The pessimism which was a feature so strongly marked in his character became ere

long abnormally developed, and before the end came he was the most miserable man within the four seas. Not that he fell away all at once. He passed through many phases first. For a time he was in that state of artificial exaltation—the reaction from excessive nervous depression which fidgety people often display. He tried to shut his eyes to unpleasant facts, to ignore and utterly disbelieve them, seeking thus to cheat himself into false security. But his last state was worse than his first. By degrees, and in spite of himself, the flimsy veil was torn asunder; the naked unpalatable truth forced itself upon him, and could not be escaped.

The brokers, to whom he had for a long time entrusted his affairs, were men of the highest respectability and acumen, but of slightly speculative tendencies. It was owing to the enterprising astuteness of the working partner, that the firm of Garland and Cornerup had become famous. There was no one like Jan Cornerup. His manipulation of syndicates, his judgment of the public pulse,

and his management of capitalists had gained him so high a reputation, that foreign potentates and premiers felt secure if he was concerned in launching a new loan. His word was law, his nod was as good as a wink. He had in this way not only amassed considerable wealth for himself, but he had put several clients in the way of good things. Among them, Colonel Forsyth had to thank him for several plums in the shape of differences on the right side, and the colonel, in his turn, had helped his son-in-law, Dominic Gwynne, more than once to a share. But when the troubles came, Mr. Cornerup grew out of favour with the colonel. The astute broker was in fact too cautious for his client. Mr. Cornerup knew when to venture, when to hold aloof; Colonel Forsyth did not. The former saw that the golden days were on the wane, and others of doubtful issue close at hand. Like a keen-eyed mariner he watched the barometer of finance, and took in sail directly the mercury began to fall. Not that he was selfish enough to leave others in

danger while he alone escaped. He warned them all plainly of the coming storm, and bade them draw in betimes. Many did so, and thanked him. Colonel Forsyth would not, but lost faith in the sagacious financier in whom he had hitherto believed, and laughed his advice to scorn.

Colonel Forsyth could not, or rather did not, choose to believe Mr. Cornerup's prognostications of coming evil. For once he was untrue to his own nature. He took the bright side. He thought and persisted in thinking the best ; and as is commonly the case when a man adopts a line contrary to his own instincts, he becomes obstinately and fanatically wedded to the opposite side. He was inclined to despise Cornerup for showing the white feather. There was no real danger, he said, no permanent risk. The times were only changing. Things must mend before long ; everything must eventually become right. There was not a doubt Cornerup was a craven, who wished to make everyone as cowardly as himself.

But in spite of his hopefulness things did not mend. They went rather from bad to worse. Still for a long time Colonel Forsyth continued to ignore all portents, to despise all warnings. No one could persuade him that the Khedive was a sharp practitioner, that Hungarians were shaky, Turks rotten, Russians doubtful, Peruvians unsound. Even when depreciation set in, he saw his favourite securities decline without a shadow of misgiving. Hungarians went from 80 to 60; Egyptians from 69 to 43; Peruvians became almost invisible; Russians were quoted at twenty per cent. worse than a year or two before, and still Colonel Forsyth could not bring himself to believe that matters were in a bad way.

The awakening came suddenly. Some of the stocks he held were announced one morning as unsaleable; in others there were those violent fluctuations which often indicate approaching dissolution. Then he began at once to be thoroughly alarmed. He went to Mr. Cornerup, who simply washed his hands

of the whole affair. Colonel Forsyth had been warned in the very plainest terms. The brokers could accept no responsibility. They would tender no advice. Whereupon Colonel Forsyth, in a huff, said he would withdraw his business. Of course, said Messrs. Garland and Cornerup, he was free to go where he pleased. He did, and from henceforth Colonel Forsyth's life became a burden to him. Indeed, he succeeded in making the lives of all who were allied or brought into contact with him no less burdensome and unhappy. In the vain hope of retrieving his losses, he embarked upon the dangerous waters of the riskiest speculation, and simply became more and more involved.

His fidus Achates was one Aaron Nitch-niwitch, a member of the Stock Exchange, but not one of whom that honourable body was particularly proud. There are many in that constantly but unfairly abused house whose spotless reputations and unblemished careers will bear comparison with those of the first names in the financial world. But there

are black, or at least shady sheep, in every flock, and Nitchniwitch was one whose wool was not exactly white. There was nothing tangible against him, of course, or he would have disappeared into the outer darkness beyond Capel Court, but he was an oily, slippery little customer, with all the worst characteristics of the Hebrew strongly developed in him, although he stoutly repudiated that he was of Jewish descent.

But his appearance and his speech both bewrayed him. He could no more escape from his nose than the Ethiopian from his skin. He could no more avoid saying, 'shent per shent,' and 'shelp me,' than a Cockney can control his aspirates according to the commonly received rule.

He was quite the man of fashion, however. Dressed always to perfection ; his hat was one of the glossiest, his boots were beautifully varnished, his frockcoat was a work of art ; the flower in his button-hole seemed perennial—winter and summer it was always there. Not less perpetual was the smiling

and cheerful look upon his round well-nourished face, and the look of hopefulness and encouragement in his bright-beady black eyes. Both were intended to stimulate confidence, and they generally had the desired effect—certainly with Colonel Forsyth.

Nitchniwitch very speedily consoled and comforted him. Things were not gay, certainly, the broker said, but they might be worse. A little skill and adroitness was all that was wanted ; courage to seize opportunities, pluck, if necessary, to hold on, without rashness of course, until the tide turned.

Colonel Forsyth was delighted. This was a man after his own heart. Nitchniwitch knew what he was about, and would certainly pull the chestnuts, or a great part of them, out of the fire. All the broker's schemes were gladly accepted and approved. Ere long the colonel found himself so deeply involved in bulling and bearing, that he stood to win back nearly all that he had already lost—or, but this was a preposterous off-chance—to lose the remainder of his private means.

We might have left him on the highroad to ruin without this long digression, were it not that the fortunes of our friend Dominic Gwynne were closely bound up with his. Colonel Forsyth had not for some time communicated his misgivings to his son-in-law. While he was still hopeful himself, there was no occasion to unsettle Dominic's mind. But when matters began to look ugly, and Cornerup threw him over, the colonel felt it to be his duty to ask Dominic to share the worries and anxieties of the crisis. He did so at first cautiously and by vague innuendo, hinting that money was a little tight, things were a little uneasy, but they would soon get better. There was nothing to be seriously alarmed about ; panic was really the only thing to be feared.

But presently he changed his tone. It became most lugubrious and desponding. He could not answer for what might happen. Everything was going by the board ; Cornerup even had thrown up the sponge. Dominic must really look into his affairs for

himself. He—Colonel Forsyth—could no longer be responsible.

What this meant for Dominic, all but those who are especially innocent of and unconversant with business matters, can easily conceive. He was bewildered by the jargon of the Stock Exchange, confused by the perpetual ups and downs of the market; at times driven wild with doubts which reached almost to the climax of despair.

Colonel Forsyth was perpetually telegraphing to him: 'Sudden panic in South Bolivians—cannot act—come at once.'

Whereupon he was compelled to throw his palette and brushes on one side, and waste the precious painting morning hours in hanging about Capel Court.

Then he was introduced to Mr. Nitchni-witch, who promised to take the entire management of his investments. Dominic consented gladly enough, provided he himself was left alone. Certainly; Mr. Nitchni-witch would do everything, only occasionally

consulting his principal and keeping him informed of the steps taken.

Nitchniwitch pointed out in a few lucid words how Dominic ought to act.

‘You will sell Egyptians, Bolivians, Cormandels—20,000 say, of each.’

‘But I haven’t a quarter of the quantity.’

‘You don’t understand. You sell them, but you don’t deliver till the account. They are 39; next week they’ll have gone down about 10 per cent. You will buy what you want to hand over at the lower price, and put the balance in your pocket.’

‘But if they go up?’ which to Dominic seemed just as likely as that they should go down.

‘But they won’t,’ replied Nitchniwitch airily; ‘I have it on the most undeniable authority. I get the straightest tips. That’s my business, and those stocks—all three of them—will go worse, mark my words, within a week.’

‘I sincerely hope they may,’ replied Dominic, silenced, not convinced.

‘Then you’ll buy Russians, Brazilians, and Argentines—about the same of each—they’re going up. You buy one at 90 to a quarter, three eighths, another at 97, three-quarters, seven eighths. Next week they’ll be 3 per cent. better, when handed over to you, and again you collar the swag. That’s the way, Mr. Gwynne; the nimble ninepence, and all without turning a hair. You leave it to me. Before the month’s out I’ll have got you out of your worst investments without loss, and landed you in Colonial Stocks and Consols if you choose.’

For a time all went smoothly enough. At least Dominic was not worried, and that was something. He got periodical statements from Nitchniwitch, which were very perplexing, but which, nevertheless, he believed to be satisfactory. Occasionally he met the colonel, who compared notes with him, and imparted to him much of his own confidence in their new broker’s skill.

‘It was a lucky day for us, Gwynne, depend upon it, when we gave him *carte-*

blanche to act. Why, he has handed me over already—at least it's to my credit in their books—nearly fifteen hundred pounds' clear profit on South Cinghalese railways alone. It's wonderful how he succeeds. He's a born financier. He'll be a Rothschild if he lives.'

And remains in England, Colonel Forsyth might have added.

One fine morning the 'Times' City article announced the sudden departure of Mr. Nitchniwitch for Spain. A paragraph headed, 'Failure and alleged defalcations of a stock-broker,' went the round of the papers, and the cry of victims sorely stricken rose on every side.

None were more hardly hit than Dominic and Colonel Forsyth. The latter lost all his private means at one blow. Lady Clementina's jointure was fortunately safe; but the colonel's liabilities could only be met by raising money on his life, and to meet the policies required at his age would make heavy inroads upon the income he got through his wife. It was necessary to give

up the house in Brook Street—to sell off everything. For the first time in her life, Lady Clementina would have to do without a carriage. 'Fancy a FitzHugh on foot,' she said in a tone of querulous fretfulness, which rapidly gained upon her as her troubles increased. To continue to live in London was out of the question. They must go abroad and economise—some small German or Italian town, it did not matter which. Colonel Forsyth was for the first, Lady Clementina for the second, and she had it her own way. Lady Clementina seemed not unlikely to have everything her own way, at least for some time to come. Her husband had no fight left in him. He was too much broken by his mishaps. Not only could he no longer control his wife, as he was wont, but he could not even show a front against her upbraiding. When she passed on from these, as she presently did, to exaggerated nervousness and fits of hysterical depression, he gave in to her so completely, that there was no doubt that now at last his hitherto

well-disciplined wife was about to get the better of him.

There had been no scene between Colonel Forsyth and the Gwynnes. It is true that Winnifred, when she first heard of these financial troubles, had been seriously vexed with her father for leading Dominic into mischief. She had had her misgivings also as to Nitchniwitch ; but then she confessed she knew nothing about such things, and if her father and Dominic thought it all right, there was nothing to be said. All she cared about was that her husband should not be interfered with in his work. She would not have him annoyed. It injured his painting, which was not to be borne.

But when the crash came, and she knew how heavily the blow had fallen upon her father, she could not find it in her heart to upbraid. She and her husband were heavy losers also, but then they were young, and could by industry retrieve their position. What Colonel Forsyth lost, he lost absolutely ; and it was a serious matter to middle-aged people to

retrench and give up the comforts which had grown to be part of their daily life. So she cast no reproaches upon her father, but simply expressed her regrets at what had occurred.

‘ You will believe me, I trust, when I say that I am truly sorry, Winnifred. I thought I had acted for the best. What has Dominic lost ? Six or seven thousand—so much ! I’ve lost more, far more, and I don’t know which way to turn. I have had to part with that Beycheville ’67, and the Château Neuf du Pape, which I had laid down to drink next year. I must drink whisky-and-water now. I don’t know where to look for a five-pound note ; I haven’t smoked a decent cigar since I don’t know when. Has Dominic any cigars in the house ? ’

‘ He’s no smoker, father ; but we have a box or two for our friends. I’ll go and get you a bundle.’

She went out and brought back a parcel made up and fastened, which she gave into his hands, and he went away thanking her profusely.

When he opened the bundle, he found a couple of ten-pound notes inside with the cigars. Winnifred had been touched with her father's distress. He looked so different too. His hat had lost its gloss, there was none of the old beau's neatness in his attire. There had not been time yet for his clothes to become shabby, but they were clearly uncared for, unbrushed, spotted here and there with stains and dust, as though the colonel had not learnt to act his own valet. He had begun to grow a beard too, a white stubby beard, and this added to the unkempt raggedness of the old man. Winnifred pitied her father from the bottom of her heart.

And yet ten-pound notes were not plentiful at The Farm just then.

Christmas was approaching, and with it, as usual with all the impecunious people, the season when financial pressure is most seriously felt. For some time past income had not balanced expenditure at The Farm. There were some large outstanding accounts. A heavy bill at the wine merchants; the

framemakers and the colourmen were rather clamorous; the whole of the bill for the alteration and improvement of the house was not paid, and the contractors were dissatisfied at the delay. Over and above these larger and more pressing claims, there was the host of small bills, each ten or twenty pounds or more, which would, brought to one general total, amount to a very considerable figure.

But for the dishonesty and mismanagement by which his savings had all been swept away, the present crisis of indebtedness would scarcely have been worth a second thought. Dominic could easily have put matters right by drawing upon his capital, as he had often done before. He had, unhappily, no capital now to draw upon. His balance at the bankers was by no means large, and although he had several pictures in hand, none were far enough advanced to obtain a certain sale.

Help came from a quarter where it was least to be expected. One dark December morning, when Dominic was apostrophising our miserable climate in no measured terms

as he sat before a large canvas on which he was about to work, a card was brought in.

‘Mr. Christison, Smokingham and Rathbone Place.’

‘Shall we see him?’ Dominic asked of Winnifred.

‘Certainly. I was afraid he was never coming again. Can he have heard?’

Christison was bluff and hearty as usual.

‘Why, Mr. Gwynne, it’s a month of Sundays since we met. How goes it—well? And you, ma’am, blooming? as I see.’

‘Sit down, Mr. Christison. I hope you’re well.’

‘I’d rather look about. But I’m interrupting you perhaps? But this ain’t a sky day, is it? Now what have you got to show—um —ah. Pointsman. Good notion—that sold? no. Give you 500*l.* for it. No? 600*l.* then. No—guineas. Any more? Done along with you. A lot of niggers working in the mud—what’s that mean?’

‘Convicts at work. It’s to be called “Toil and Trouble.” That’s promised.’

‘Ah, well, no matter. But you have got a whopping canvas here. What’s this for? Something grand, eh? Coronation—Children of Israel coming out of the Ark—Battle of Waterloo—something of that sort I take it—eh? What’s it to be?’

‘I have hardly worked out the idea yet,’ said Dominic absently. ‘It may come to nothing after all. I’ll show it you later on.’

‘No, Dominic; tell Mr. Christison at once. I will if you don’t. It’s the best notion he’s ever had, I think. “The Vision of Sin.”’

‘Scriptural, eh! um—ah. Won’t wash nowadays.’

‘Not a bit. Modern sin in Babylon, I mean London. See, this is the sketch for the big picture.’

And Winnifred produced a carefully executed water-colour drawing which Christison carefully examined.

‘A London street. Dawn breaking. Figures on the balcony; ball going on up-

stairs ; picking pockets downstairs ; bobbies ; traviatas ; and all that,' said Christison.

' Come, this is my sort. Just what I like —sold ? '

' Of course not ; it's not begun.'

' I'll take it. I'm satisfied. What's the figure ? '

' Well, it's large. It will take many months,' said Winnifred, beginning to haggle. ' Many months' hard work.'

' Shall we say two thou. ? '

Dominic and Winnifred looked at each other.

' Part down if you like. There, what could be handsomer ? '

Still Dominic would not answer.

' I'll spring another 500*l.*—2,500*l.* for a blank canvas. Lord, what a sum ! '

' And how much down ? ' asked Winnifred.

' Half.'

It was a tempting offer—too tempting to be refused.

' It's a bargain,' said Winnifred.

‘We’d better put it in writing,’ said Christison. ‘I don’t distrust you; nor you me, I daresay, but it’s better to make a thing past spoiling. Got pens and paper?’

Christison sat down to write.

‘This here’s a large sum to plant out, so you’ll excuse me if I just put in a word or two about time. You ain’t the fastest workman, Mr. Gwynne, if I may say so, and I can’t afford to be out of money all my life. When shall we say? next Academy?’

‘Ridiculous. Why, it’s December already.’

‘Well, then, next? That’s fair enough—eh?’

‘Certainly; I can promise it by then.’

So the bond was made out. In consideration of the sum of 1,250*l.*, advanced by Mr. Christison, Mr. Dominic Gwynne promised to complete the picture (size described), entitled ‘The Vision of Sin,’ on or before April 1, 187—, and upon its delivery, the said Mr. Christison would complete the purchase-money, by paying a further sum of 1,250*l.*

To which both signed their names. A

model, who was in waiting, attested the signatures. Mr. Christison handed over a cheque for 1,880*l.*, and after a little desultory conversation left the house.

‘That’s a good stroke of business all in one half-hour,’ said Dominic with a sigh of relief. ‘This will just put us straight, and a little to spare.’

‘Yes; but you are now in Christison’s power,’ said Winnifred, as a spasm of apprehension shot across her face.

CHAPTER VII.

To a highly sensitive nature such as Dominic's these financial troubles were a perpetual worry and annoyance. They completely unhinged and unsettled him. Had his hat, as the saying is, covered all his responsibilities, he might have shaken himself free of all horrid doubts and misgivings. He could have accepted service once again with his old friends of the 'Picturesque News,' and after a year or more of the old active and adventurous life of a correspondent, with his strength and nerve restored, might have resumed his old place in the art world. But to leave Winnifred and the boys, to separate himself even for a short space of time from his beloved belongings, to exile himself from the happy home to which he was so fondly attached—it was simply out of the question. Nothing

but the pressure of positive want could ever have reconciled him to such a step.

But had matters come to so serious a pass? Surely not. They might recover themselves. It would merely be necessary to retrench ; to reduce their style of living, to move into a smaller house, and their fortunes would soon be restored. He had his art still to fall back upon. Stocks might smash, and securities go by the run, but, after all, his brain and skilful hands were sound and substantial property, which he could only be deprived of by some most untoward accident.

Dominic arguing thus with himself felt really more at ease. He had but to set his face resolutely to his easel and work hard. There was a mine of wealth inexhaustible, while his powers remained intact, at the end of that long brush of his. It was the true philosopher's stone; those hog-hair bristles could transmute Eatwell and Roberson's pigments into the purest gold. Half-a-dozen pictures well-placed, would soon retrieve past misfortunes. Once again his balance would

grow fat and respectable, and he might again lay by, and in sounder investments, a new nest egg to replace that which he had already unhappily lost.

He told Winnifred all this, again and again, in their many close and anxious consultations, when disasters were coming thick upon them. He was so hopeful and brave. It was nothing more than a temporary inconvenience he said ; let him but have his head, and he would wipe off all embarrassments before the end of the year. She would soon see. There was that picture of the 'Gladiators' ; the smaller canvas of the 'Victory going down with the Mail ;' that other of the 'Widow's Cruse'—all of them wanted but a few strokes apiece. Then he had half-a-dozen new and excellent ideas ; they needed only to be planned and put together in black and white, which he could do the first time he had five minutes to spare. And then the great work—that was well advanced, although it was not to be delivered till that day twelve-months. As a matter of fact he might dis-

pose of it long before the dark days at the end of the year, and that would bring another thousand pounds into their pockets at once.

Winnifred was far less sanguine. She knew her husband's disposition and temperament so well, that she doubted whether he would long continue in these good resolves. Yet she did her best openly to encourage him, and pat him on the back. No doubt he could easily accomplish all that he said if he only made up his mind to work, and work hard. But in her secret heart she was sore afraid. What if this paramount necessity for strenuous exertion paralysed his best endeavours? What if with the best intentions in the world, Dominic's fastidious spirit revolted altogether against the tyranny of enforced labour, and he could produce nothing at all? Or it might be that, although he struggled manfully to persevere, the efforts of working thus against the collar might react upon his art. He might lose his delicacy of treatment, his creative faculties might flag, his pictures miss that refinement of finish, due to

his patient and thoughtful elaboration of them, which had been one principal charm of his work, and degenerate into the 'slick' commonplace productions of other facile performers.

Something of this became apparent to closely observant eyes, as time wore on. There was a certain change not altogether for the better in the painter's work. Neither Dominic nor Winnifred were unconscious of it, but both sought to conceal the fact from themselves and from one another. Dominic fought against the feeling, and sought to explain it away, in the over-anxiety which possessed him to get on at all costs. Hitherto when he had been discontented and dissatisfied with himself, there had been no paramount necessity for progress. Whenever he was working against the grain, he desisted till fresh inspiration came. But now he could not afford thus to humour his fancies. He could not tarry by the way. His pictures must be finished, sent off and disposed of with all reasonable despatch. He dismissed therefore, or thought he dismissed, the notion that he was

painting below his proper level. He would not allow it even to himself, still less to Winifred, when they discussed as usual the progresses of the canvases in hand.

As for his wife, the thought came to her more than once that Dominic was deteriorating. In spite of herself she sometimes experienced a new sense of disappointment as she examined her husband's pictures. They failed to satisfy her so completely as of old. They seemed to lack the high qualities which once so pre-eminently distinguished them, to be wanting in that nameless charm which the productions of real genius possess, and which it is so difficult to gauge exactly, or describe in mere words. But she would not have confessed one particle of this for worlds. She resolutely shut her eyes to the fact, and refused altogether to believe what they told her.

She went, indeed, to the other extreme. It was of such vital importance—and this for more reasons than that of the existing financial pressure, as I shall presently explain—

that her husband should not be disheartened or discouraged just now, that Winnifred grew quite fulsome in her praises of what he did. She was often rapturous when a few months before she would have been coldly and severely critical. She lavished encomiums so freely that Dominic smiled, and said that she was laying them on with a palette knife. 'No, but really,' she would say, 'that bit of texture is simply admirable ;' 'you never painted anything better than those hands ;' 'as a piece of composition the picture is simply perfect.'

But these cheering phrases rose often from a heavy heart. They nearly choked her sometimes. She could hardly frame the words she spoke with such smiling lips and such a bright look in her eyes. The effort was too much for her, and more than once she almost broke down. At such times a fit of nervous depression seized her, and she began to think her worst forebodings would be realised. Dominic had shot his bolt ; he was going down hill.

Did others think so too? It was the fear of this which intensified, and in a great measure exaggerated, her apprehensions. Never before had she seemed so anxious to secure the suffrages and good-will of the chief personages in the art world. She hung upon the verdict of the critics, deferred to the strictures of painter comrades who came and suggested improvements; she picked up thankfully crumbs of consolation thrown to her by the magnates of the Academy, who told her this thing or that was 'meritorious, really very meritorious indeed.'

All these she treasured up and administered to Dominic, like sugar-plums to a good boy. They would serve, she hoped, to strengthen and encourage him to struggle on; would brace him to strain every nerve—despite opposing influences—to maintain his reputation and keep the place he had so deservedly won, to secure one yet higher upon the rungs of his profession.

There was a chance of the last-named even then, and this it was which more espe-

cially exercised Winnifred's spirit. Dominic, as we know, had never placed much store by the honour of being counted among the members of the Royal Academy. He was not more eager now, although in his altered circumstances he had a faint perception of the commercial value of a secure place for half-a-dozen works upon the Academy 'line.' But for this he would not have given the matter a second thought, beyond esteeming the compliment to his art which the election would imply. Winnifred, on the other hand, had coveted the honour for her husband from the first. She had, to begin with, a stronger sense of its solid advantages than Dominic, but she was really egged on by that intense admiration and love for him which longed to see him widely esteemed and crowned with the highest rewards.

Therefore it was that the existence of three vacancies among the Associates at this particular juncture greatly increased Winnifred's anxieties. Dominic ought to have as good a chance as anyone else, but it

would all depend upon the work he turned out this year. It was indispensable that he should be well represented ; that the pictures he sent in should be, if anything, above his usual mark. Any falling-off would be fatal to his hopes.

In this she estimated rightly enough. Dominic was still upon his promotion. His position, although a good one, was precarious, not really assured. His reputation had been so rapidly achieved that his very success had gained him many detractors. Professional men are especially jealous of all who overtake and threaten to outstrip them in the race for fame and honour. The veteran horses do not care to be beaten by the two-year-olds ; the colts themselves look askance at a dangerous competitor of their own age who promises to leave them all behind. Although already Dominic Gwynne had a certain following—as at the Zooks—men who believed in him thoroughly, who praised his work to the echo, who predicted for him a great and lasting name—there were others who thought

him ridiculously overrated. Opinions were greatly divided as to the measure of his genius. He was a hero to the new school, but to the old men he was a hare-brained innovator, leading the van of that progressive spirit which saw but little good in the work they did. His critics were ranged in two camps, one as hostile as the other was enthusiastic in his praise. The opposing parties were not very evenly matched; perhaps his friends were numerous, but his opponents carried heavier metal, and, as was said, not without reason, Dominic often played into their hands.

Dominic's slackness of production had done him infinite harm. It encouraged people to attribute his success to mere luck. His best work was a fluke. He had hit upon a happy subject, and treated it well. He never would do anything so fine again. He knew in his own heart that he was weak, and was afraid to risk laurels he had so cheaply earned. That which was in truth his praise —his resolute determination to give the world only his most complete and most finished

work—was quoted in his disfavour, and magnified into a fault.

Again, into those upper circles which from long prescription are presumed to be inhabited by the aristocracy of art—in the Academy, that is to say—Dominic's shortcomings did not pass unnoticed. He and his probable future were frequently canvassed among them, as indeed is usually the case with all promising young painters. He had friends among the R.A.s, but friends who were neither staunch nor numerous. Such of them as were true men honestly admitted his powers, but there were some who went to the opposite extreme, and who would concede him neither ability nor merit except of the commonest kind. Nor was it in Dominic's favour that he was a slow workman. The commercial spirit may not exactly rule the Academy, but its traditions are all in favour of what will attract the shillings. A painter who was but rarely represented on the walls could contribute no very substantial aid to the annual show. Besides which Dominic's

work could not be relied upon as of the popular kind, and where claims are pretty evenly balanced that candidate for Academical honours has the best chance who will most certainly attract the crowd. The successful portrait painter, the clever interpreter of modern sentiment who has the trick of reproducing life in progress around us, stand always a better chance of election than the poet whose imaginative work the sympathetic and cultivated intelligence alone can comprehend.

Dominic Gwynne was one of the latter class. It was thought that only by fits and starts and at long intervals would he take his part in the fight, and that often enough he would be a mere dummy. Yet more, it was felt that even when an exhibitor his pictures would probably be caviare to the general public, and little likely to swell the receipts at the door.

That such sentiments were entertained by certain influential Academicians had crept out now and again, although never expressed in so many words. Of course it had annoyed Winnifred extremely to hear of them. She

seemed to see behind them an adverse influence ; she fancied at times that perhaps the injured Crammersh had the inclination and the power to intrigue against Dominic, that his well-known munificence as a patron would lend weight to his innuendoes, and that gratitude for past favours and others still to come might beguile those who had sold or hoped to sell to Crammersh to see with his eyes and endorse his depreciation of Dominic Gwynne.

Vexed and agitated by these various considerations, it was but natural that Winnifred's anxiety should sometimes come to the surface. With Dominic she felt it her duty still to dissemble, lest she might affect his work injuriously. But her distress of mind was plainly evident to others of her many friends. The most intimate offered her sympathy according to their means. The young fellows from the Zooks, who were all stoutest henchmen, used the most emphatic language when discussing Dominic's chances. According to them, it would be a burning shame if he

were not elected this time. He had been passed over too often already. The last two men elected had been notoriously effete and incompetent. 'That is why they took them,' said Lubbock, forgetting French for the moment, and speaking idiomatic English. 'They only patronise the duffers—like themselves. Talk about strengthening themselves from without! Why Maltby never painted a good picture in his life, and Gawker was old and worn out a dozen years ago.'

'That's just it. They've a strong affinity for the feeble cripples with one leg in the grave.'

'It's all jealousy, Mrs. Gwynne, take my word for it. They're afraid of him; that's why they won't have him.'

'Don't say they *won't* have him, Mr. Stevens, please. I've set my heart on getting him in.'

'Anything you've set your heart on you shall have, in reason, Winnifred,' said cousin Bobby Fitzhugh, who came in just then. 'What is it this time?'

‘Mrs. Gwynne wants to get her husband into the R.A.’

‘The R.A.—the Royal Artillery do you mean? What an extraordinary idea! He’s too old to be a gunner now. He ought to have begun years ago. Won’t the Volunteers do as well?’ They laughed aloud, as usual, at Bobby’s misconceptions.

‘No, Bobby; I don’t want to make a soldier of him now. That’s a little late in the day, as you suggest. I want to get him into the Royal Academy.’

‘Isn’t he in it? I thought he was a member ages ago.’

‘He ought to be.’

‘Well, but surely he sends his pictures to the Academy. I’ve seen them there—lots of them. That makes him a member, does it not?’

‘No more than wearing a sword makes a field marshal, Bobby.’

‘I shall be one if I live long enough.’

‘So will Dominic be an Academician; but, you see, we don’t want to wait till then.’

Dominic himself was seldom present at these discussions. He did not like to hear people talking about him to his face. It jarred upon him to hear his praises sung aloud; he would not even allow that he had any grievance in having been left out so long in the cold. But sometimes he could not help himself. ‘They will take me when I’m ripe for election. I can’t expect it yet. It’s far too soon. Why, I only exhibited my first picture seven years ago.’

‘Modesty may be carried too far, Dominic,’ said his best champion, his wife. ‘If you let people sit upon you, they’ll keep you down always.’

‘That depends upon their weight. But I am most averse from putting myself forward in any way. I have no right, and more than that, I have no inclination.’

‘I quite agree with you, Dominic,’ says old Guy Greatorex, who just then was the only other person present. ‘It is extremely bad taste for a man to manœuvre for his own

advancement—and such a pettifogging advancement as this.'

'Who accuses Dominic of manœuvring?' cries Winnifred, on fire at once.

'No one, as yet, perhaps. But they would, if it was known that he was eager to get in. And if he does not stir a finger himself, others are not quite so discreet.'

'Meaning——?' Winnifred's lip curled.

'I make no insinuations. I only say that even the best friends are injudicious at times.'

'Are we to count Mr. Greatorex among his best friends?'

'I think that is established beyond question,' replied Guy very gravely. 'Dominic knows how keen is the interest I have taken in him from the first.'

'I have good reason to know to what lengths your anxiety for his welfare will take you. Your advice, had he listened to it, might have shipwrecked his happiness and mine.'

And Winnifred took her husband's hand in hers as if to range him on her side.

‘Come, come, Winnifred,’ Dominic said gently, ‘let bygones be bygones. Mr. Greatorex did not know you as well as I did—and he has long since repented him of his errors.’

Old Guy looked grim and sour, even a little uncomfortable, but said never a word. Had he not been wrong, utterly wrong? Winnifred had proved the very reverse—so far—of what he had anticipated. But would this last to the end? would she always continue the devoted wife, placing her husband’s art, his interests, his fame, above all other considerations? might not some day the old leaven re-appear? might not the love of admiration, the personal vanity, once more re-assert their dominion over the light frivolous nature?

‘But I must be off to my easel,’ cried Dominic cheerily. ‘I’ll leave you two to make it up together. You are always quarrelling, but I believe you like each other extremely in your hearts.’

Neither Winnifred nor Guy spoke for some time after Dominic had left them.

‘Am I forgiven?’ Greatorex asked grumpily at last. ‘I forgot myself; I am sorry.’

‘It is a matter of supreme indifference to me whether you are ashamed of yourself, as you ought to be, or not. But I will forgive you, on condition that you do your best to help Dominic in his election.’

‘What can I do? Less than nothing.’

‘You might help with the Press—urge his claims upon the Academicians you know.’

‘I know none, beyond a mere nodding acquaintance. As for the Press, I have no influence whatever. Besides, I must confess I think to take such steps most unworthy of you. It savours of intrigue.’

‘Others intrigue. Why should not I? All I want is to succeed. But I really believe you do not care whether he gets in or not.’

‘Frankly, I would much rather he did not.’

‘Mr. Greatorex, how can you dare to say so, and to me?’

‘You know my views about the Royal Academy. I have the greatest contempt for the whole institution.’

‘So has Lord Yellowborough, and yet——’

‘He has offered to help you in the way you wish, has he?’

‘Most certainly. He would do all that and more.’

‘No doubt,’ said Guy Greatorex, more grimly than he had spoken before.

‘I know you hate him, but that is no reason why I should.’

‘Certainly not, quite the contrary.’

‘I do like him, I confess; and I have good reason to do so. He has been most kind.’

‘Of course, that is his nature.’

‘And he has himself volunteered the assistance which you will not give, even when I ask you.’

‘I cannot sacrifice my independence, or my convictions, even to gratify Mrs. Gwynne. But I must be going;’ and

after a few commonplaces, Guy Greatorex departed. As he passed down the garden towards the main road, he met Yellowborough running up the walk, with an air of feeble animation on his vapid face.

‘Oh! can you tell me, shall I find Mrs. Gwynne at home? It is most important.’

‘You had better ask the servants,’ growled out Greatorex. ‘I don’t know what her orders are.’

‘Oh, she is always at home to me. I mean is she alone?’

‘Mr. Gwynne was there when I left.’

‘How annoying, how vexatious! I must speak to her alone. And I came by appointment, too! She expressly told me she would receive me quite privately to-day. And now you tell me——’

‘That her husband is with her. Most unusual and extraordinary fact, certainly.’

‘He is always in the way; it’s preposterous. Who ever heard of a husband of our generation who was always in the way?’

‘I daresay you would like to put him

out of it,' Greatorex said, half audibly, as he stalked off, furious to think that his greatest friend's wife should give even a shadow of encouragement to such a creature as this.

Lord Yellowborough, however, was agreeably disappointed. He found Winnifred alone, and charmed to receive him.

'Why, Lord Yellowborough, you look quite radiant.'

'It is only reflected lustre; I am like the moon.'

'The inconstant moon.'

'Never, I swear!' he struck his breast and with dramatic action. 'But I am radiant because I bring good news.'

'Really; concerning your great undertaking?'

'Exactly. I have won Mr. —, brought him down flying—bagged him.'

'But how?'

'With a cheque. I have bought one of his monstrous canvases, "Henry VIII. abolishing the Monasteries." He was so delighted to sell to me, he said, that he listened for an

hour to my strictures on English art, and when I ended by saying there was only one man who could save our school from degradation, he thought I meant him, and declared I was the first art critic in England. After that, he subscribed readily to all my views ; and when I spoke for Dominic, he swore he had always had his eye on him, and would strive to bring him in next election at all costs.'

'You are indeed a true friend, Lord Yellowborough,' Winnifred said, and gratefully held out her hand.

'My dearest creature, for one smile of approval from those eyes I would——' began Lord Yellowborough in a sort of ecstasy.

'Come, come, Lord Yellowborough, you must not presume. I am truly sensible of your extreme kindness, and I can never forget it, nor—myself.'

'Scold me, lash me, flay me, sear me with red-hot irons, but do not drive me forth—I will never offend again—never.'

And his lordship began capering about the room like a lap-dog which has offended

its mistress, whining and gesticulating, till at last he flung himself, with a howl, all of a heap among the cushions of a wide sofa, and seemed about to give up the ghost.

Winnifred got up very quietly and rang the bell.

‘Thyrza, tell your master that Lord Yellowborough has been taken very ill; and that I wish he would come down at once.’

‘Oh! no, no, no,’ cried Lord Yellowborough. ‘Do not disturb him, I beg. It is such a good painting light—he is, I know, so busy. I am better, Mrs. Gwynne—a thousand thanks—better, I assure you.’

‘Will you try sal-volatile, or a little brandy, or what?’

‘I have my own vinaigrette. It will put me right directly.’

Lord Yellowborough sniffed furiously at a small gold smelling-bottle set in pearls and turquoise, and presently said—

‘It is over. I am sane, sound, whole once again. It is the last time, I promise, upon my honour.’

‘Why do you stand so in your own light, Lord Yellowborough? I like you, I esteem you, I fight your battles, but some day I shall have to forbid you to enter my house.’

Lord Yellowborough put his hands together as in piteous entreaty, and made such a miserable face that Winnifred burst out laughing.

‘And I had hoped to have been so happy. I had so much to tell you, which you would, I am sure, like to hear.’

‘Anything more?’

‘Only this—I have just bought a paper.’

‘Which? What does it say?’

‘The “Scalpel.” It will say just what I please.’

‘I don’t understand. How can a paper say what you please when it is printed?’

‘But it is not printed—at least to-morrow’s isn’t printed. To-day’s may be.’

‘You did not buy it at a stall then?’

‘No, no, in the market. It was in the market, so I secured it. You know it is a journal devoted to criticism.’

‘Like the “Blister”?’

‘Yes, I meant to have the “Blister,” but I was too late. Crammersh, you know, Lady Adeline’s husband—he got that.’

‘Has Mr. Crammersh bought a paper? What on earth for?’

‘To advance his own views I suppose, as I am going to do. My principal view is that religion is culture, and Dominic its prophet.’

Could Winnifred fail to be touched by partisanship which could go such lengths? Really Lord Yellowborough deserved her very warmest thanks, and he got them, somewhat cautiously expressed perhaps, for Winnifred was not sure of him now. But there could be no question of the little peer’s friendliness. It amounted indeed to chivalrous devotion, and so Dominic thought too when he heard the whole story.

Guy Greatorex was of a different opinion.

‘I wonder you can accept such a service from that odious little wretch. How can you

repay him? He places you under an obligation from which you can never free yourself?

‘He does it of his own free will. It is out of pure kindness to me.’

‘He does it to curry favour with your wife—and she—’

‘Greatorex, how dare you speak to me like that?’ Dominic’s eyes flashed fire.

‘I claim my right as your oldest friend to put you on your guard. It is my duty.’

‘Is it your duty to sow suspicion where it never existed, to shake confidence the most unbounded, to seek to undermine happiness which no cloud has ever ruffled? It is not like you, old Guy. You will regret this; you will be sorry that your strange hostility to Winnifred has betrayed you into such a speech.’

Dominic, without waiting to hear whether Greatorex would endeavour to justify himself, strode away.

There was not a spark of jealousy in Dominic’s composition. He had moreover

that deep, unquestioning trustfulness in his Winnifred, that he felt it would be an insult to her and to his own better judgment to repeat to her what Greatorex had said.

But he could not quite forget it. The barb rankled where it lodged. It left an angry spot, which might have disappeared by the absence of all irritation, but which the constant presence of Lord Yellowborough at The Farm in a measure kept alive. At times he made up his mind to speak to Winnifred. Then he feared that the mere hint of Greatorex's cruel insinuation would be an indignity to his wife. No; Winnifred should never know how unjust, how unfair, his old friend could be. By-and-by, he might tell her, and they would both laugh at it, as a long-past and forgotten vexation.

Still he did not forget the remark, much as he strove to do so. Foolish and unjustifiable though the suspicion were, it often possessed and preoccupied his mind, and this was a crisis in his career when his mind should have been free from all anxieties abso-

lutely. Any worry, even the most trivial, tended to interfere with the right and proper prosecution of the work he had in hand. His pictures suffered in proportion as he was himself disturbed. How greatly he was disturbed by the various annoyances which just now crowded on him was unhappily plainly apparent as the time approached for 'sending in.'

Even the most loyal and enthusiastic friends were compelled to confess that Gwynne was not 'so strong' as he had been in previous years.

He had completed—but not at all to his own satisfaction—three canvases, two of ambitious dimensions, the third a small poetic landscape. The first, called 'A Pointsman,' endeavoured to realise pictorially the awful drama of a railway accident. The catastrophe had but just occurred ; the crash and turmoil, shown in the newly splintered carriages that lay here and there, twisted into extraordinary shapes, the heart-rending agony of the ill-fated victims, gazing up with blanched faces at the peaceful summer sky—all these were

faithfully represented. But they were accessories only, distant, small, in the background ; the principal figure was the unhappy man whose error had caused the terrible mishap. He was close up to the front, his eyeballs distended with horror, his hands clenched, his attitude that of overmastering despair. On one side a little girl, his child, who had brought him his dinner, was plucking his trowsers as if to rouse him ; further off two railway officials were pointing towards him, as if they had just given the verdict against him, and visited upon him the whole blame.

The second picture, entitled 'Toil and Trouble,' although different in character and degree, was no less painful in the sentiment it conveyed. It portrayed the gruesome life of those whom their misdeeds have consigned to perpetual labour as prisoners of the State. The scene might have been at Portland or Portsmouth, Chatham or Dartmoor ; the landscape was no close imitation of these well-known spots ; it was idealised rather after the manner of the dreary hills in the

backgrounds of Holman Hunt's 'Scapegoat.' Bold cliffs, a long expanse of stony, sterile soil, over all a dull grey sky ; the whole of the picture was dark and forbidding, save where through a rift in the clouds the sun shone brightly down upon the square tower of a village church, as if to remind even the most wretched that hope is never absent from the darkest scene. But the scene was otherwise gloomy, almost disagreeably sad. The picture was crowded with figures, hundreds of men in dusky drab, bending to their tasks, grouped around trucks and cranes, lifting logs and massive blocks of stone, plying spades and picks, hammers and chisel, ceaselessly active and industrious. Over all the Argus-eyed overseers, stern-visaged warders armed with sword and rifle, maintained order, and kept everyone to his task.

'A Wet Harvest,' the third picture was called ; a soddened, rain-soaked landscape in a flat country. Although the waters were not out, the wide ditches had overflowed and encroached upon the corn fields ; the sheaves

stood like islands, each with a lake of its own; under a neighbouring hedge the field hands cowered to escape the pitiless pelting showers, and all nature, animate and inanimate, seemed drenched to the skin. Above was a sky evidently surcharged with moisture, grey and evenly monotonous in tone, except where a few slips of wan, pale blue mocked mortals below with vain hopes of better weather close at hand.

The key in which all three pictures was pitched was decidedly lugubrious and low. Dominic said himself that he had had enough of idealised beauty, had enough of beautiful dreams; he wished now for once to paint in truthful colours the real life that went on around us every day. The intention was praiseworthy, but it failed. He might indeed have painted in this or any other key had his pictures been otherwise maintained at their usual level. But this year's work was unmistakably below par. Their chief fault was their want of completeness. It was on this account that the colour in many passages was

crude, that portions of the canvas were 'to let,' that other portions were covered with ill-digested details. The very execution, the handling, the technical work was indifferent, and these were points in which Dominic had always been triumphantly strong.

Friends, who had hitherto spoken only in the warmest terms, shook their heads doubtfully now, and were either half-hearted in their praise or said nothing at all. At the many consultations and very private views Winnifred looked eagerly for what she did not obtain—a more favourable estimate of her husband's art than she herself had framed. Unhappily they endorsed her opinion only too entirely. One or two of the most frank hinted that Dominic would do wisely to keep back one at least, possibly two pictures, and give them the benefit of another year's work.

But Dominic was very obstinate. He had made up his mind to send them in, and in they should go. They were sold on that condition. He could not forego the price. He wanted the money, that was the fact;

he wanted to boil the pot. Of course he could improve them. Never yet had he sent anything out of his studio which he could not have improved if he had kept it longer. He would paint on these by-and-by, when the pressure was over, but now they must go in as they were. He was heartily sick of them, and could not have touched them again for untold gold. There was the usual home exhibition ; Winnifred gave several art evenings on purpose that the pictures should be seen as much as possible beforehand. There were long strings of carriages drawn up along the main road of Pedlar's Green, every day of the week before sending in, very much to the wrath and jealous discontent of Mrs. Simpkins and Mrs. Mudge, and other art critics whose 'carriage visitors' at this important season were few and far between. On Picture Sunday the throng at The Farm was so great that, had the Gwynnes charged a shilling entrance, they might have amassed a considerable sum.

Then, as usual, the vans called on Tues-

day and took off the three pictures. With them was a more humble contribution from Winnifred—portraits really of her own sweet mischievous boys. ‘Arcades ambo’ it had been christened, for one little rascal was busy smearing his face with jam, and the other was munching bread and butter with extraordinary gusto.

For her own small venture Winnifred had no particular anxiety. It might be hung well, ill, or not at all. It was the fate that would meet Dominic’s that vexed her heart through the long days of weary waiting. They would be accepted, of course. That went without saying. The time was long past when his pictures could be rejected, but there were many degrees of honour for those even which were hung. Which would be on the ‘line’? All or only two? Would it only be in the large room or not, or in the lecture room, or where? What if they were all skyed?

Bad news travels always apace, and although no man would willingly have been the

first to bring the evil report, it soon became known at The Farm that Dominic had been treated exceedingly ill. The 'Pointsman' was in a corner, low down, in one of the end rooms, where all its broad outlines and rough painting were exaggerated. 'Toil and Trouble' was in the lecture room certainly, but near the skylight, and all the character of the picture with its small figures and minute incident, was lost, except to those who brought powerful opera-glasses to bear upon the subject. As for the 'Wet Harvest,' it was upon the line in the principal room, but jammed between two large academical pictures, one of which, representing a court ceremonial, was likely to be the picture of the year.

'It is quite scandalous!' cried Winnifred on varnishing day. Her own small picture was in, and was quite in a place of honour. 'To think so much of the best space being occupied with pure rubbish, such as——'s and X——'s'—she ran over half-a-dozen leading names on her fingers—'while Dominic is skyed or floored! They shall hear about this, I

declare. I'll give them all a bit of my mind, even the President himself.'

But there was worse in store for the unfortunate painter. Dominic's luck was all against him this year. His pictures not only failed to hit off the public taste, but they attracted the scorn and contumely of nearly all the critics. This is a specimen of what they said. It is an extract from the 'Morning Muffin,' by no means a virulent print:— 'Seldom has there been a more lamentable instance of that vaulting ambition which over-leaps itself than in the pretentious essay and lamentable failure of Mr. Dominic Gwynne. We have long watched with unflagging interest the onward career of this young painter, for we seemed to discover in him traits of distinction, which promised to raise him some day high above the crowd. But already he shows signs of decay. Of his three pictures none are noticeable except for the insipidity and cheap sentiment with which he has covered acres of canvas and expended cartloads of paint. In the "Pointsman" we find,' &c., &c.

And so on through three columns.

Others were far more abusive, but none surpassed the 'Blister,' which was mustard, powdered horseflies, and cantharides all in one.

'And this is the young man who was called the coming painter, the man who was to rescue English art from degradation ! Painter forsooth ! He had better turn grocer, or secure a crossing while there is yet time. Even the street artist with his chalks can show better results upon his pavement than Mr. Gwynne with all the appliances of the artist colourman. Degradation indeed ! What shall we say of the young painter who would drag down his art to chronicle the daily life of convicts, who gives us with brutal realism the sickening episodes of the charnel-house ? He cannot even depict Nature except in a maudlin mood ; sooner than give us the bright, peaceful summer landscape, the gladsome spring or autumn with its plenteous gold, he selects a wet harvest tide for his subject, and strives to surprise us by forced

sentiment, exaggerated contrasts, and fustian rhodomontade. It is not from amongst such harebrained, stage-struck sensationalists that our Academy will find its most promising recruits. If English art is to hold its own—as in spite of spiteful detractors it has for many years—before the whole world, the work of these pretentious gymnasts must be gauged at its true value, and their pitiful excesses repressed.'

Against this storm of disapproval only one voice was heard in Dominic's defence. A voice which made itself heard in shrill passionate accents, which used stinging epigrammatic expressions, but which, nevertheless, made no particular mark. This was the art critic of the '*Scalpel*', no less a personage than its noble proprietor, who from the first took up the gauntlet, and championed Dominic through thick and thin. He devoted column after column to eulogistic reviews of Dominic's work; examined in detail and discussed minutely all he had ever produced; drew the most flattering horoscope of the future of this great painter whose star

was in the ascendant and would soon reach the zenith of its effulgent fame.

It was well meant all this, but it did Dominic more harm than good. For a time the 'Scalpel's' articles, which were written with *verve* and not without knowledge, carried a certain weight. Only when it came to be understood that the paper was Lord Yellowborough's, and people began to recognise his eccentric hand in its fulsome panegyrics, its credit was rudely shaken. All this exaggerated praise was but the penny-a-lining of a hireling hack. Yellowborough was the slave of Mrs. Gwynne. He wrote to her order ; he was paid by her approving smiles. Who was to believe in the utterances of a journal which had been bought, although not in sterling coin of the realm ?

There was worse behind. The 'Scalpel' did not limit itself to the exaltation of Dominic Gwynne. It fastened also upon all opponents, studiously underrated all whom its contemporaries delighted in, and sought to tear many old-established reputations to rags.

This alienated from Dominic many veteran painters who had hitherto been well-disposed towards him. They looked upon him as an ally and accomplice of Lord Yellowborough, tinged with his art heresies, like him a radical and a communist who wished to raze all existing art institutions to the ground. Firebrands such as these should be extinguished. They were dangerous neighbours, impossible associates, and must, if conflagration was to be avoided, be summarily repressed.

So it was that Dominic's fame suffered seriously by Yellowborough's championship. Nor was Winnifred's altogether benefited by the general impression which was now abroad that his lordship was for ever at her feet.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was the evening of the election of the three Associates. The event was one of considerable importance in the art world, and there was a great gathering that night at the Zooks.

They were all full of it of course.

‘How will it go?’ asks one.

‘There’s Maltby, he’s first favourite. The “Wood” is for him to a man. The men in the “Wood” are like the Conservative party—know the value of compact organisation, and they carry what they wish.’

‘Who else?’

‘Townshend has a good chance. That was a fine picture of his, and the Prince praised it at dinner. Quite enough for the R.A.’s.’

‘And Nick Gwynne, of course?’

‘Nick Gwynne’s not in it, mark my words,’ growled out old Greatorex; ‘not this journey, and I thank God for it.’

‘They say he’s counting on it.’

‘Very unlike him if he is. I don’t believe it.’

‘His wife is.’

‘Oh, she? That’s because she’ll be able to make more show when Gwynne is an A.R.A.; not but what they hold their head high enough already,’ said Simkins, whose wife provided him with ideas.

‘You don’t know her, I think?’ Stevens asked very seriously.

‘I don’t, and I don’t want to.’

‘Then you don’t know one of the most perfect, the most charming women upon God’s earth;’ and Stevens waved his pipe in the air, emphasizing his words.

‘Psha!’ said Greatorex. ‘In my opinion he’s far too good for her. But has anyone seen him? Is he here to-night?’

He’s not likely to show.’

'On the contrary, I saw him upstairs in the billiard-room half an hour ago.'

The fact was Winnifred had driven him forth. She was on tenterhooks. He did not seem to care in the least. This aggravated her, she said. She had no patience with his *sangfroid*. He thought it did not matter; but he was wrong. He had laughed to scorn all the unkind things hurled at him in the papers, but to be so reckless was a terrible mistake.

'I don't care, Winnifred, because they cannot injure me really. I shall do lots of good work yet, in spite of them. Abuse of this sort will only put me on my mettle. There's lots left in me yet; you'll see that.'

But he left the house as she wished, and came up to the club after dinner, thinking that, perhaps, he might get the news, one way or the other, a little earlier, and so relieve Winnifred's mind.

It was long past ten before anything was

known. The conclave in Burlington House was a protracted one, and when news came it did not appear trustworthy. First arrived a 'model,' an old man who had followed this precarious profession many years. He was breathless, having run the whole distance. He asked for Mr. Simkins, and to him communicated the glad tidings that he had 'come in'; a second model followed and gave the first the lie flat. It was Lubbock and Townshend and Gwynne.

By this time both were carried forcibly to the smoking-room, and cross-examined. They contradicted themselves and waxed wroth with one another; then combined forces against a third, who came with a new version. So it went on, till, presently, one of the younger Associates, who was himself a member of the club, arrived upon the scene, and from him authentic intelligence was obtained.

'Simkins, Townshend, Maltby. Those were the three.'

'And Gwynne?'

‘Hardly a “scratch” for him.’

Dominic heard, but only laughed.

‘Better luck next time. At any rate, I am glad for Simkins. You ought to have come in long ago, and I am heartily pleased you’ve got your rights at last.’

And with that Dominic shook his more favoured competitor, who blushed deeply, by the hand.

‘You don’t mind much, I hope, Dominic?’ said Greatorex in a kindly voice. It was the first time they had spoken together for weeks and weeks.

‘Not one bit. It’s only for Winnifred. But I must go and break it to her. Come and help me.’

Leaving Simkins ordering champagne-cup for the party, which was rapidly growing uproarious, Dominic and Greatorex took a hansom and drove off post-haste to The Farm.

There was a brougham waiting at the door. Letting himself in with a latchkey, Dominic made for the drawing-room, where they found Winnifred—and Lord Yellow-

borough. She was looking moodily into the fire, while her companion was standing on the hearth-rug gesticulating wildly with his hands and talking very fast.

‘You take it too much to heart,’ he had been saying; ‘you do indeed, my dear Mrs. Gwynne. You lay too great a stress upon an empty honour.’

‘I had set my heart on it. I am bitterly disappointed.’

‘I see you are; I feel it, and I sympathise with you. Oh, what can I do? Oh, what can I do to lessen the poignancy of your grief? What consolation can I offer? will you accept the assurances of a devotion——’

It was at this moment Dominic and Greatorex entered. The latter heard the last phrase distinctly, but Dominic did not seem to notice the words. He only saw Winnifred’s woebegone attitude.

‘I see I have been forestalled, darling! I hoped to be the first to break the bad news.’

‘Oh, Dominic!’ and Winnifred put her

hand in his, and could hardly repress her tears as she looked up in his bright trustful face.

Was she not playing a part? That was the question Greatorex asked himself directly. Had he not heard Lord Yellowborough make a distinct declaration a few seconds before? Yet here was she welcoming her husband with all the warmth of a true deep-seated affection. Guy Greatorex's heart was full of concentrated bile and bitterness against the devilish duplicity of the whole female sex.

‘You, I hope, are bearing up more bravely, Mr. Gwynne?’ said Lord Yellowborough. ‘You can estimate more exactly the utter worthlessness of the honour you have missed. You can and will rise superior to a petty annoyance to which the most sensitive and highly wrought nature of a charming woman would succumb. Say you will not brood over this, Mr. Gwynne; that you will not give it another thought, and you shall soon be avenged—nobly avenged.’

‘I see in my mind’s eye’—and the little peer rose upon tiptoe as if to see better into the far-off future—‘I see in my mind’s eye the proximate ruin and destruction of that pernicious upas-tree which has long cast its baleful influence over English art. . The time is rapidly approaching when the axe will be laid at its root, when the fire of devouring scorn and withering contempt will consume it utterly. I have long since planned and proposed to myself a vast scheme designed to this great and glorious end. The days of the Royal Academy are numbered. Ere long its acres of wall-space will be deserted, no footsteps will echo in its dreary silent halls, its gates will be closed, the whole place will be in Chancery or to let.’

‘And how does your lordship propose to accomplish this great feat? By legislation?’ Greatorex asked in his usual contemptuous tone when addressing Lord Yellowborough.

‘Sir, I have no confidence in Parliament, no faith in the Legislature. I despise my seat in the Upper House, and would resign

it if I could. No, I shall carry out my project alone and unaided. If the toil and burden fall on me alone, to me alone will be the glory.'

'Well, but, Lord Yellowborough,' said Winnifred, raising herself, 'do not speak in parables. Be more explicit. What would you do?'

'Dear lady, I would found a new Academy of Arts—a true temple of genius, where the work of genius should be freely admitted and displayed in that glorious setting which real genius has a right to claim. Its exterior should be an architectural triumph, its interior palatial: pillars of porphyry and alabaster, curtains of costly stuff, a ceiling of gold and enamel, a pavement of Venetian mosaic. Fountains of perfumed water, exotic shrubs and flowers, should charm two senses, while the third revelled in the sight of the choicest masterpieces of contemporary art.'

'And by whom would these be selected?' asked Greatorex.

‘By me,’ and Lord Yellowborough placed his hand upon his shirt front, and looked proudly round, as one who was a benefactor to every age.

‘It’s not a bad idea, I must confess,’ Winnifred said thoughtfully. ‘But it will cost you a fortune.’

‘What matter? Money is mere dross, and I shall have earned the gratitude of those I most esteem.’

‘But it’s too big a subject to discuss in five minutes, especially to-night,’ said Dominic laughing; ‘and to-morrow, Lord Yellowborough, perhaps, you will have repented of your generosity.’

‘Never. It is no sudden outburst of enthusiasm, but the long-settled resolve of my calmer moments. I mean to do it, upon my word.’

‘It’s the maddest and most harebrained scheme ever conceived beyond Bedlam,’ cried Greatorex hotly.

‘Why, I thought you also were a mortal foe to the Academy?’

‘I do not like it; but it is not to be reformed or affected by such a Quixotic enterprise as this.’

‘That’s your opinion, Mr. Greatorex,’ said Winnifred, taking the opposite side of course. ‘For my part, I think the notion splendid, and if it is only half realised, Lord Yellowborough will deserve our richest thanks. He has mine for the intention, even if it never becomes an accomplished fact.’

‘Oh, with all my heart,’ said Guy sulkily. ‘But it is late. Good-night, Dominic. Never say die. You will beat them yet off your own bat.’

‘The mouse helped the lion,’ said the little peer, ‘and I presume to do as much. But I am going townwards—can I offer you a seat in my brougham?’

‘Thank you, I prefer to walk;’ and Greatorex let Lord Yellowborough drive off, saying as soon as he was gone :

‘If I was alone in the carriage with that insufferable young jackanapes, I should wring his neck.’

‘Go it, Guy. You are as hard on him as usual.’

‘I have reason, I think. But it is not for me to abuse him, if you don’t. You heard, I presume, what he was saying to your wife as we came in.’

‘Not the least; what was it?’

‘You had better ask Mrs. Gwynne.’

‘I will; we have no secrets.’

Winnifred was seated, with her hands clasped upon her knees in an attitude of despair, when Dominic re-entered. Her air was so evidently that of perturbation and annoyance—on his account?—that he could not at first bring himself to question her, as Greatorex suggested.

‘What do I think of it?’ she asked abruptly; ‘of the election?’

‘No, no, no. That’s bad enough, of course. But we’ll speak of it directly. I mean of this project of Lord Yellowborough’s. It’s far-fetched, I fear; chimerical, impossible of realisation.’

‘Mr. Greatorex speaks in you, of course.’

‘No; we did not discuss it. He’s not wrapt up in Yellowborough certainly, nor, for the matter of that, am I.’

‘He’s a good friend to you, nevertheless. Lord Yellowborough has no thought but the idea of advancing art and benefiting men like yourself, who are *incompris*, and who are denied their deserts.’

She spoke with so much warmth that Dominic was glad that Greatorex did not hear her defending the æsthetic peer. Her ardour rather jarred upon Dominic, and he was disposed to insist upon an answer to his first question.

‘His lordship is infinitely kind. But I wish to know what you and he were talking about this afternoon when Greatorex and I arrived.’

Winnifred looked round at him suddenly and sharply.

‘What? Dominic Gwynne growing jealous in his old age!’

‘I only ask a simple question. What were you talking about?’

‘I forget, really; mere trivialities. Lord Yellowborough talks little else—to me. I’ll ask him, however, to-morrow.’

‘He is coming to-morrow?’

‘I imagine so; he comes most days.’

‘That’s just what I object to.’

‘Now look here, Dominic. You and I are not going to quarrel, and at some one else’s bidding, particularly on such a night as this. I am too much unnerved and unstrung.’

Dominic did not answer for a moment, then with an effort said:

‘Well, let’s talk about something else. You have heard, I suppose, who really did come in?’

‘Yes, such creatures. Simkins of all people. That’s why I am so vexed and hurt.’

‘I am not the least cast down. I believe it will do me good. I wanted a fillip. Now I feel that they have put me on my mettle,

and I shall work fifty times better. It can do me no harm.'

'Other people won't take it in this way, I'm afraid. It's a sort of slap in the face—and after all that abuse in the papers.'

'Psha! As if anybody cared or believed in newspaper criticism. Besides, a great deal of the worst came from Crammersh, and it was plain he bore malice, and why? I feel that he has no real power to injure me.'

'I'm not so sure of that. But we shall see.'

One of the first visitors at The Farm next morning was Christison, the dealer. He came ostensibly to condole, but his commiseration was all for himself.

'It's a bad job, Gwynne.' This familiarity plainly showed his mood. 'A bad job for you and me.'

'How does it affect you?'

'Ain't I got a heap of money invested in your pictures, and how am I to make a living if they don't sell?'

'It hasn't come to that yet,' said Winni-

fred haughtily. 'If you don't choose to buy, others will.'

'Will they?' screamed the latter. 'But you see I'm planted already. I shall have that great hulking canvas on my hands, without a chance of placing it. Maybe it won't be hung, leastaways not on the line. Then I and my thousand cooters will be left out in the cold.'

'You shall not be the loser. You can have your cheque back if you wish.'

'That's fair enough, certainly. But you won't pay up the profit I might have made. That's what I want. I feel I'm sold. Where's my property? That's it with its back to the wall. Bring it out and let's see its face.'

Dominic resented the peremptoriness of tone.

'I never show my work unless it suits me.'

'But it's my property. You must show it to me.'

'I'll show you the door double quick,' cried Dominic. 'That's about all you'll see here to-day.' He was furious.

‘How dare you come down here hectoring and bullying?’ went on Winnifred. ‘You shan’t have the “Vision of Sin” at all now.’

‘That’s good news. I don’t want it. But I want my thousand pounds. Send me a cheque for that, and we’ll cry quits.’

‘We’re not bound to—until the time expires,’ said Winnifred, thinking rather dubiously of the bank balance, and the drain so large a cheque would be.

‘Then if you hold to your part of the bargain, I hold to mine, and I want to see my picture.’

Why quarrel with the man? He had the power to make himself very disagreeable, and it was an inconvenient time to break with him altogether.

The picture was produced, brought to the light, turned this way and that upon the heavy easel, and scanned as usual at various distances and in curious attitudes.

‘H’m!’ said Christison. ‘You’ve got a lot to do to it.’

‘This is only June. I’ve twelvemonths before me, and I mean to work hard.’

‘I don’t know what to say, I’m sure.’ Christison was rubbing his chin thoughtfully. —‘It may turn up trumps, and again it may not. I don’t like the look of the thing. I don’t, upon my soul, I don’t.’

‘Well, the matter’s in your own hands.’

‘Look ’ere, Gwynne. I’ll be frank with you. This here’s been a great disappointment to me. I built upon your coming in, or you don’t suppose I’d have ventured all that money? a pile of money like that. You’ve missed your tip. Is that any reason why I should go to the wall? It’s the making of a good picture, I don’t deny. But I don’t see my money in it. I don’t, I swear, and I can’t afford to lose such a pile.’

So he went on for half-an-hour, woeful and desponding, lamenting Dominic’s degeneration, but more especially his own bad luck — till, at last, Winnifred, wearied to death of him, cried, ‘We’ve had enough of this, Mr. Christison. You mustn’t cry out till you’re

hurt. We're not quite ruined yet, nor has Mr. Gwynne forgotten how to paint.'

'I don't see my way, I don't, and I'm a poor man—'

'You'll not be any poorer through us, that you may rest assured.'

He went away at length, grumbling and growling to his heart's content, leaving Dominic and Winnifred free to discuss the object of the visit.

'It means mischief, of course,' said Winnifred. 'Some one has put him up to this. Mr. Crammersh, no doubt, as I always suspected. What ought we to do, Dominic?'

He was squeezing colours out of their tubes, and setting his palette.

'This is what I mean to do. Work off the debt with my brush. I never felt more like work.'

'That's all right enough, but I think we ought to find another purchaser. It would make us the more independent. I believe—'

'Lord Yellowborough would buy the picture,' she was going to say; but, remembering

Dominic's foolish and ill-founded remarks the night previous, she refrained.

Her own mind, however, was made up privately. The picture should be sold, and well, if possible, at once. She had never 'touted' before, but there were strong reasons now.

Strong reasons, too, why she should go out and show herself as usual, or more than usual, in the great world. It should never be said that she laid this disappointment so much to heart that she meant to withdraw from society. Besides, it gave her so good an opportunity of laughing off the whole affair. People who condoled with her were told that the grapes might be thought sour, but she had never wished Dominic to be in the Academy. He himself was opposed to it, so were her best friends—at which people smiled meaningfully, as though they doubted whether it was not Winnifred's best friend, and not her husband's, of whom she spoke.

For Lord Yellowborough was more devoted than ever. He followed Winnifred

everywhere, and paid her the most marked attention. The great scheme of the Yellow-borough Pinacothek had been promulgated by this time, and this was looked upon as another, and a costly act of homage. His lordship indeed spoke of it as such. In ventilating the project and expatiating upon its great aims, he made it plainly evident that his principal aim was the apotheosis of Dominic Gwynne. Indeed some one had asked him whether he did not pray that the painter might soon be translated to a higher sphere. Nor did he repudiate the insinuation that his proposed patronage of art was mainly intended to ingratiate himself further with Mrs. Gwynne. His great idea was to *afficher* himself with her everywhere.

As for Winnifred, self-reliant and reckless as of old, she simply laughed at Lord Yellow-borough. She declined to acknowledge that he paid her many attentions. She was quite able to hold her own, and to take care of herself. Besides, it was well that she should continue to count him as her slave. He was to buy

the 'Vision of Sin,' that she was determined, or at least he was to erect an edifice worthy of it, in which it should be the central and most prominent picture. They were closely interwoven—Lord Yellowborough's project and Dominic's fame. The great picture and the Pinacothek would help each other, and rise into notoriety at the same time.

All this gave these two—the vain, and, it must be confessed, vicious peer, and the thoughtless but well-meaning wife—many points of common interest. It made Lord Yellowborough always welcome by Winnifred's side; it made her listen with plainly marked satisfaction to his rhodomontade; it made her, worst of all, blind and callous to the sarcastic glances, the critical shrugs, the openly uttered innuendoes, which comrades of her own sex, more judicious in their flirtations, and male freelances, amused and interested in Lord Yellowborough's progress, now indulged in without stint.

There was one person, however, to whom Winnifred's thoughtless conduct gave infinite

pain. The gossip of society came, concentrated, not diluted, to Guy Greatorex, who was of society although he seldom cared to be in it. At first he turned a deaf ear to all the talk. Why should he go out of his way to hear what was certain to raise his ire? But as he thought of the patient husband, toiling and striving at home to retrieve his position—for Dominic had of late shut himself up altogether, and was wholly devoted to his work—while this flirting, flaunting dame galvanized about the world, neglecting her home, his blood boiled, and he was as eager to speak his mind as any latter-day saint with what he considers a special message to mankind. Nevertheless he hesitated. Dominic had not taken his last hints in good part. Would he credit these new and obviously more unsatisfactory reports? It might lead to an open rupture between them, and Greatorex, like other men of his age, was loth to part with an old friend. New ones of the right kind are not encountered on every bush; nor is it easy to bridge over the gap between the mere ac-

quaintance, of whom most men have hundreds, and the intimate, tried friends, who, in the course of years, have come to be part and parcel of his life. Hence the days slipped away, and the season was almost at an end, before he could make up his mind to speak, in explicit language, to Dominic Gwynne.

It would have been better for the peace of mind of all concerned if he had continued for ever to hold his peace.

It was a piping hot day in August. Dominic was in the studio, and at his easel, in his shirt sleeves, hard at work.

Alone, so far so good.

Guy Greatorex stood behind him for some time before the painter was conscious of his visitor's presence. Nor did Guy speak. The picture at first engrossed all his attention.

The 'Vision of Sin' had progressed very considerably in the two months since Christison saw it. Dominic had tackled it manfully, and, spurred by the excitement of a struggle

against misconception, had treated it with most remarkable success.

The scene was the balcony of a corner house in a great London thoroughfare, Piccadilly probably, so arranged that the eastern sky should be brought in, where,

On the glimmering limit far withdrawn,
God made himself an awful rose of dawn.

The pure, pale light, with its tender fleecy clouds, contrasted with the garish brilliance of a thousand waxlights, full in the blaze of which sat two figures, the man clasping the woman's hand and bending over in passionate entreaty. Behind and above were glimpses of the whirling crowd of dancers within, in reckless, furious enjoyment of the passing hour. Below the balcony, upon the pavement, were the waifs of life; a weary-footed woman or two, in draggled finery, and with them their pale-faced debauchees. One fallen Eve leers impudently at her swain, another turns her eyes upwards at the balcony and seems to draw mental compari-

son as to which of the two women should dare to throw the stone at the other. Not far off hover the hungry birds of prey ; one nimble thief has his hands already in the pocket of a half-conscious swain. In the distance, approaching with measured step, is the guardian and representative of order, about to sweep away and remove decorously out of sight these outward and depressing signs that civilisation is not perfect, and man as sinful as ever.

The painter was moralist, satirist, preacher, all in one. He was Hogarth, Juvenal, Jeremy Taylor,. There were grim humour, pungent satire, tender promise and hopefulness in a far-off future—all these were combined upon the canvas and depicted in the most masterly fashion.

‘Why, Dominic ! What a tremendous thing it is ! I had no notion you would make so much of it as this. It is by far the finest thing you ever have done.’

‘I have thrown my whole soul into it. I felt the subject thoroughly from the first.’

‘This will bring you into the Academy hand-over-hand.’

‘I shall not send it there. It will go to the Pinacothek.’

‘Can it be possible that you are bitten too by that mad little Yellowborough’s idea? I fancied that it had died a natural death long ago, not that a sensible fellow like you still supported and encouraged it.’

‘To tell you the truth, I have not thought very much about it, Guy. But Winnifred has been full of it for some time past, and I have accepted what she said.’

‘Is Mrs. Gwynne at home?’ Greatorex asked abruptly.

‘She is in the country—in Scotland in fact—on a visit. She wanted a holiday.’

‘I daresay, and you stick to the work?’

‘Quite so. The place was not quite in my line—Lady Macquoich’s. You know them, I dare say?’

‘Know them! Faith, who doesn’t, and all about them? Dominic, I pity you; I do indeed, from the bottom of my heart.’

He spoke in so grave a voice that it arrested Dominic's attention at once.

'Do pray explain yourself, Greatorex. What new notion is this that has taken possession of you ?'

'You don't know—how could you—that Strathquoich is one of the fastest houses in the kingdom ? that Lady Macquoich's own character has never been of the best ; that the people you meet there—well, we'll call them fast, quick, by what euphemism you please ; that no lady, no married lady, who respects herself—stay—I will finish ; no married woman, should be seen in the house, even were her husband by her side ; but to be seen there alone, unprotected——'

'Guy, Guy, for pity's sake, say no more. I am confident, I can assure you, that Winifred knew nothing of all this.'

'Not know ? She who is, and always has been, in the swim of society, who has always known all that went on in the world, not know ? Psha !'

'Nothing shall make me doubt her. You

might talk till Doomsday, but I shall not listen to you. There has been enough of this.'

'I came down here on purpose to speak to you about her.'

'It's mere waste of breath.'

'Did she tell you whom she expected to meet there? Was Yellowborough to be of the party?'

'I believe so. But I will not hear another word.'

'You must and shall. I cannot suffer you—I who count myself your oldest and dearest friend—I cannot permit you to remain longer in ignorance. Your eyes must be opened. You must be told the painful, unpalatable truth. You must hear that for months past gossip of the worst kind has coupled your wife's name with that of this despicable wretch Yellowborough, whose insidious advances I have watched and watched, but have failed to warn you of—'

'Guy Greatorex, this is the second time you have dared to cast aspersions upon the

pure and spotless fame of the woman I honour and revere more than I can say. I will not tolerate such language. It is an insult—the worst insult you can offer me. I do not condescend to say that I do not believe it; that my faith in my wife is such that no words, no language can shake it, but I will not even listen to you, nor will I permit you to remain under my roof. Your mere presence is an insult. I insist, Mr. Greatorex, upon your leaving my house.'

'Dominic, do not, I beseech you——'

Greatorex got no further. The door was opened, and he was bowed out.

But as soon as he was alone, Dominic put down his palette, buried his head in his hands, and cried like a child.

He remembered how eager she had been to accept the invitation; how she had at first urged him to give himself a holiday; how when he stoutly declined to withdraw himself from his work, she had declared she would go alone. There were reasons, she had said—good reasons, why she should be at Mac-

quoich. It was an artistic house; the great scheme of the Pinacothek was to be argued out there, and Winnifred wished to be one of the party, to see that Lord Yellowborough did not go back from his word.

‘Were these her real reasons?’ he asked himself, with a sinking heart, again and again, till the load of increasing misery seemed to entirely weigh him down. Then, with a sudden effort, he shook himself free from these horrible doubts.

‘Craven despicable hound that I am to distrust her. From this time forth I shall hate Guy Greatorex—even his very name. But nothing shall shake my faith in Winnifred my wife.’

He seized his palette and sheaf of brushes, and clambering up the high studio ladder recommenced work near the top of the canvas.

‘She shall see that I have not lost much time——’

Would she?

CHAPTER IX.

THE house at Strathquoich had been a nice shooting lodge, an old-fashioned Highland fastness, but its owners had enlarged and developed it into a most luxurious home. Sir Malcolm Macquoich was devoted to sport, his wife to society. He was never so happy as when waist-deep in the water, thrashing a favourite pool ; her idea of bliss was a snug corner in a ball-room, or a *tête-à-tête* in her own boudoir, carrying on a red-hot flirtation. Sir Malcolm didn't mind in the least. So long as he had his spring fishings, his summers in Norway, his autumns on the moor, her ladyship might follow her own devices without let or hindrance from him. He stipulated only that a certain number of the guests, who so constantly filled the house, should be good guns and skilful rods ; for

Sir Malcolm was very tenacious of the credit of Strathquoich and of the bags it produced. But Lady Macquoich, who had the well-known predilection of advancing years, chose her special favourites among the newly-fledged guardsmen, or youngsters just launched in the world. There were few among her friends who could not show up well on river or moor.

It was an amusing house to stay in, and the fun was generally fast and furious. Larks were perpetually in progress from morning till night. The elevating sport of practical joking was not entirely unknown, and a bore was very apt to find a pig in his bed when he went upstairs at night, or a strong detachment from the poultry yard was let in on him before he was awake. During the day, expeditions were organised for those who cared to join the shooting party. At lunch, much manœuvring went on for the right couples to get seats close together. In the evening, despite the day's fatigues, people danced or played boisterous and rather romping games.

People lived all about it. The dimensions of the house itself had been stretched as far as architectural skill could go, rooms added here, utilised there, but still there was not half space enough for Lady Macquoich's numerous guests. So other buildings were erected, cottages and villas, within a stone's throw of the house, and even the farm-house was pressed into the service, and made an excellent bachelors' hall. As a general rule the men lived out ; the main house itself was reserved for the ladies. Even matrimonial rights had to succumb to the rule. Lady Macquoich's decrees of separation were as absolute and inflexible as those of Sir James Hannen, and it was a curious spectacle to see husband and wife nodding recognitions to each other at the Strathquoich breakfast-table, as though they had not seen each other for weeks.

Winnifred, it must be confessed, was a little surprised at the company in which she found herself. She had no real conception of the sort of place Strathquoich was. An 'art' house ! The art of enjoyment was

about the only one practised or known. Save Lord Yellowborongh there was no person in the house who could tell a water-colour from an oil.

What annoyed her most of all was the familiarity and overtures to *camaraderie* which the elder women made her, as though she was one of themselves. They were none of them very bad, so far as she knew, but they were certainly not of her sort. Lady Macquoich was a silly woman, the wrong side of forty, whose aim and ambition it was to look still young. She had been a beauty, and could not willingly forego the pleasure of posing as one still. So she painted her face artistically, and dyed her hair the colour she thought would suit her best, and imagined she imposed upon the public, as she did upon herself. There was Mrs. Stinger, of whom no one could say anything half so bad as she said of everybody else. She had a history of her own—not a particularly good one—and she had conceived the happy idea that to attack others was the best way to

divert criticism from herself. She was a sort of female Ishmaelite, whose hand was against everyone. She credited people with the worst intentions, would never acknowledge merit even of the most obviously transcendent kind. Her attitude was one of invariable depreciation. She ran everybody down, even her long-suffering tradesmen who supported her and whom she very rarely paid. When there was no ground for virulent abuse, she merely ridiculed ; if unhappily the social armour of her victims displayed weak points, she stabbed them through the chinks with the keen weapons of her malevolent tongue.

Mrs. Stinger was naturally not popular. What she might say when one's back was turned made everyone view her with distrust and dislike. At a house like Strathquoich, where charitable toleration was always needed, it was thought best to disarm her by friendliness, and she received many pressing invitations to this as to other places, because she might do so much more mischief if she stayed away. Even in the house, however, she ma-

ligned and traduced people to one another with the result that all the weak ones were very much afraid of her. Winnifred was disposed to meet her with her own weapons, giving back scorn for detraction, and replying to innuendoes by *tu quoque* or defiant repudiation. There was no love lost between them. Mrs. Stinger hated Winnifred the more, because she was the one person who seemed to make head against her.

There were many other ladies in the house, of course. Among others, reproducing with slight variations the types of Mrs. Stinger and Lady Macquoich, there was Lady Speedy and a bevy of daughters—all attractive enough and uncommonly fast. Custom had nicknamed each after some well-known favourite for the Oaks, and these names were so generally accepted, that the girls themselves answered to them without protest. The eldest was called Formosa, the second Blink Bonny, the third Fille de l'Air.

The Speedy girls were very systematic and persistent in their endeavours to please.

They dressed in an *outré* but very becoming fashion, which set off to the best such natural gifts as they inherited. They were fond of appearing in fancy costumes at breakfast-time—in tight dresses, which set off their shapely figures, and skirts short enough to show their clocked stockings and small varnished shoes. They appeared in wonderful 'gets up' on the hill at luncheon-time, in tartans and Scotch bonnets, and once in no bad imitation of a kilt. Of an evening they rang the changes upon an endless variety of charming frocks which came straight from the hands of La Ferrière and Worth. They were ready to be all things to all men, or, more particularly, to anyone according to his taste and proclivities. Formosa was unrivalled in tying flies, an operation well calculated to emphasize the beauty of deft white fingers, and especially conducive to *tête-à-tête* flirtation. Blink Bonny was no mean shot, and she had more than once taken part in a deer drive, sharing with evident delight a shelter with another gun, where they

had excellent sport, amusing themselves extremely, but driving their attendant wild by their neglect of the real business of the day. At Strathquoich, the third girl, *Fille de l'Air*, had assumed a new *rôle* to oblige Lord Yellowborough, whom she had marked down as her prey. She lived only for art, she said ; her aspirations were all æsthetic, she revered with all the fervour of a religious devotee those great beings—Lord Yellowborough might consider himself included—who had enriched the treasures of the world by their skill and prowess. Being thus vowed to the culture of refined and exalted taste, *Fille de l'Air* scorned and forswore the pleasures of a cigarette in the smoking-room, to which hitherto she had been addicted, as indeed her two sisters still remained.

It was extraordinary that with their attractiveness none of them had married. But men, as a rule, do not care to choose a wife from among such girls as these. Now and again weak ones may tumble into the toils and fail to extricate themselves, but the wary—by far

the most numerous class—can avoid such a catastrophe, and are satisfied to amuse themselves, which they are permitted to do to their hearts' content.

If Winnifred had been eager in the first instance to go to Strathquoich, she was heartily sick of the place before she had been there a week. To begin with, the ways of the place actually shocked her. Then Lord Yellowborough's attentions were so marked that not only did they bore her to extinction, but they gave rise to significant glances and half-veiled speeches. These she could not fail to interpret, and they made her blood boil at the evident misconstruction they implied.

Her only comfort was that among the male guests were two old friends and devoted henchmen, Bobby FitzHugh and Beau Burton, both of whom were ready to act as chaperons and protectors. The first had had wit enough to express his surprise at Winnifred's appearance at Strathquoich ; the latter, after a day or two, had gone further, and seeing how the land lay had told Winnifred

she ought to make tracks, and that without loss of time.

Her own feeling was quite the same, and she had resolved to write to Dominic to prepare him for her immediate and premature return, when matters were rather precipitated by the occurrences I am about to relate.

Lord Yellowborough had no sympathy with the sportsmen, of course. It was not the least in his line, he said. The mere chase was an unintellectual pursuit ; the slaughter was an unæsthetic and disgusting operation. Therefore when other men left the house in a body, he remained behind to dangle after the women. This pleasurable pastime resolved itself with him into haunting Winnifred like a shadow. If after breakfast she seated herself in the morning room to write letters, he brought the 'Times' to read it aloud. If she went to the Strathquoich waterfall—for this property, like all other property, owned its own waterfall—and set up her sketching easel, he came too, and worked at the same subject. If she had mended stockings, he

would also have threaded a needle ; had she gone into the kitchen to help the cook, Lord Yellowborough would also have tried to assist the *chef*.

One morning Winnifred wanted a volume of Froude.

‘ Why not try the library ? ’ asked Mrs. Stinger with a half sneer.

‘ There is a library here, then ? ’

‘ One most undeniable and excellent in every respect, and a charming room for a *tête-à-tête*. Surely you knew that ? ’

‘ My experience on such a point must always yield to yours, Mrs. Stinger.’

‘ I shall be only too pleased if you will benefit by it. Shall I show you the library ? ’

‘ Oh, and may I come too ? ’ said Lord Yellowborough eagerly, like a child begging for hardbake.

‘ By all means,’ cried Mrs. Stinger ; but Winnifred gave him no encouragement.

They went off all three of them, Mrs. Stinger leading the way, Lord Yellowborough and Winnifred following.

‘You are not vexed with me,’ said his lordship—‘for intruding myself, I mean?’

‘I like your society far better than Mrs. Stinger’s, I can assure you.’

‘But you did not want me to come, now?’

‘I really did not care.’

‘That is what cuts me to the heart—you would not care if I were hung, drawn, and quartered.’

‘I should be sorry—unless you deserved it—which, after all, is quite possible.’

‘You never speak kindly to me—never give me a shadow of encouragement.’

‘Nor is it likely.’

By this time they had reached the library. It was in a far-off corner of the house, an angle tower, once part of a stronghold, with windows which had been enlarged, looking south and west. Each way the view was glorious away over the well-kept lawn and garden, across the wide brawling river, and beyond to where the brown and purple heather-clad hills closed in the landscape

with a distant wall. The room was lined with books—over the mantelpiece, under the windows, the door even was a movable bookcase, and its handles were entirely concealed.

‘Now, Mrs. Gwynne, what book is it you want? Froude?’

‘Yes; but how charming! Why, here is Hollar, and an original Bewicke, and—I could spend hours here.’

‘With a congenial companion, I presume?’

‘I want none better than a good book. They are my best friends, and I should love to rummage over these shelves to look for those I love.’

Winnifred began turning over the volumes, and soon became thoroughly absorbed.

It was Lord Yellowborough’s voice which roused her. She looked round. Mrs. Stinger was gone.

‘I had quite forgotten where I was,’ said Winnifred with a merry laugh.

‘Mrs. Stinger ran away ages ago.’

'And you——?'

'Why did not I run away too? I thought I might be of service to you, so I stayed. I will go if you wish.'

'Come along,' she said. 'We'll go together.'

Easier said than done. The door had been closed by Mrs. Stinger when she left, and except by a vague guess it was impossible to say where the outlet was. No handle was visible, no hinges. The place, except to those who knew the secret, was hermetically sealed.

'This is too preposterous,' said Winnifred. 'Ring,' she added very peremptorily; 'the servants must be within call.'

'I can find no bell. It is certainly most embarrassing. We may be imprisoned here the whole day. How dreadful!'

He did not look as if the prospect was very terrible. On the contrary, his face beamed with undisguised pleasure at the good luck which had befallen him.

'Mrs. Stinger will send or come to us

when she sees we do not appear at luncheon,' Winnifred suggested.

'Of course, no doubt,' said her companion; but he felt in his heart that Mrs. Stinger would do nothing of the kind.

'But we must try and get out before that. These windows—they look upon the garden; surely there must be men about.' She went to reconnoitre. The library was on the second storey, but the drop down seemed nothing. 'Or better still, Lord Yellow-borough. It is no great distance; will you oblige me by jumping out of the window?'

'My dearest Mrs. Gwynne—'

'It won't hurt you. There's lots of ivy. That will break your fall. You surely cannot refuse when I ask you.'

'Oh, do not ask me that. I care nothing for the danger. I would climb an Alp, swim a whirlpool, or jump down a precipice to get to you, but to leave you—nothing would induce me to do that. And why should I leave you? At length the occasion for which I have longed with my whole soul has arrived.'

I would seek to improve it. You will suffer me to assure you, here where we cannot be interrupted by listeners or intruders——'

‘Mrs. Gwynne! Hi! Mrs. Gwynne!’

A voice from below calling her name. Both started, Lord Yellowborough with ill-concealed vexation, Winnifred with delight.

She rushed to the window, and saw Major Burton standing below.

‘I thought it was you. I saw you pass the window. Why, Mrs. Gwynne, we have been hunting for you high and low, and you were hidden away here all the time! Pray come down. I have something of the utmost importance to tell you.’

‘Certainly; but how am I to get out of this place?’

‘By the door, I suppose.’

‘But there’s some secret spring or something, or the lock’s hampered. We’ve been trying this half-hour.’

‘*We*. You are not alone, then.’

‘No. Lord Yellowborough is here,’ said Winnifred, half-blushing.

‘Yes, we came with Mrs. Stinger,’ said Lord Yellowborough, coming up to the window, ‘to look for a book.’

‘And she left us in a hurry,’ went on Winnifred, ‘and shut the door behind her, and we can’t open it.’

‘Do run round, Major Burton, and try from the other side.’

The Beau hurried off as fast as he could put legs to the ground.

He found the handle—it was plainly visible outside—but the door was locked!

‘This is some of Mrs. Stinger’s handiwork,’ said the quick-witted Beau, ‘intended to compromise Mrs. Gwynne, perhaps at the special instance of Lord Yellowborough.’

What was to be done?

‘Mrs. Gwynne! Mrs. Gwynne!’ he whispered.

‘Yes, yes. Are you there? Make haste, please.’

‘I can’t open the door. There has been some silly trick in this. It is locked. Wait,

please, wait. I'll go and give Mrs. Stinger a bit of my mind.'

Mrs. Stinger and all the ladies had left the house, so the butler said. They had gone with the luncheon for the shooters to Corrie Vluchan moor.

It was quite intentional, evidently. A base plot on Mrs. Stinger's part to injure Winnifred. How to circumvent it? No time was to be lost. There were other reasons, too, for haste. Presently the Beau reappeared at the library window. He was carrying the gardener's ladder, and was followed by Winnifred's maid.

Placing it to the wall, he climbed quickly up, and was met by Winnifred with the warmest thanks.

'Have you courage enough to escape by this? It is essential too,' he lowered his voice, 'that you should leave him (pointing to the little peer) behind.'

'How can we manage that?'

'You shall come down first. Then we'll remove the ladder. I don't see how he'll

get down then unless he can fly. But hush !'

Lord Yellowborough came to them.

' It is a *mauvaise plaisanterie*, certainly. But, my dear Mrs. Gwynne, you will never venture——'

' Indeed I shall.'

' I'll leave the maid to hold the ladder,' said Major Burton, ' and you will find me in the conservatory. You will not delay, Mrs. Gwynne. You're not afraid. It's very important you should come down. FitzHugh and I have been looking everywhere for you. He has some news—very serious news'——

' Don't say more, please. It must keep. Wait till I am on *terra firma*. Now, Major Burton, do please go, and make room for me.'

Winnifred pulled her skirts tightly around and stepped out bravely on to the ladder, and quickly made her way to the ground.

The moment she had descended Major Burton disengaged the ladder and removed it from the wall.

' Stay, stay ! You will not leave me,

'surely?' Lord Yellowborough's voice was almost hysterical.

'You will have to jump, after all. It's not so bad as a precipice.'

'I'll come back,' Burton shouted, adding, *sotto voce*, 'to-morrow. But time presses, Mrs. Gwynne. FitzHugh has a light tax-cart ready at the door. He will drive you to Corrie Vluchan, where you will catch the 1.45 by the Faulds and Strathspey line south. Your things are packed—at least, what you want. The maid can follow with the rest.'

'What does it all mean? In pity's name tell me,' asked Winnifred, terrified and bewildered beyond measure.

'FitzHugh will tell you. He has had a telegram from London,—from The Farm. Your husband—'

'Go on, go on! every second prolongs my agony.'

'He has had an accident, a fall in the studio, and he is badly hurt.'

Winnifred hurried along the garden path to the point of the house where Bobby Fitz-

Hugh was waiting. She held out her hand mechanically for the dread missive, but could barely read the words for her tears.

The message was from Guy Greatorex :

‘Dominic has had an accident. Fell from studio ladder. Seriously injured. You ought to return if you can.’

‘Oh, Bobby, shall we do it?’ These were her first and only words as within ten minutes they were rattling over the stones of the rough Highland road.

‘By a neck, but we’ll do it all the same. They did catch the train, and with five minutes to spare.

‘Thank you, Bobby,’ Winnifred said simply but with streaming eyes as she put out her hand. ‘Good-bye. You have been a true friend in my distress.’

‘It’s not good-bye at all. I’m coming too.’

‘To Edinburgh?’

‘No; all the way. You’re not fit to travel by yourself. You’d miss all the trains and go the wrong road.’

Winnifred made a feeble protest, but she

was really glad to be relieved of all responsibility as to herself. Yet the relief gave her more leisure for introspection, more time for self-upbraidings, and keenly intensified her misery, her anxiety, and self-reproach.

That she should have been absent from her husband on the occurrence of this dreadful catastrophe was her first and most poignant regret. Then she remembered that she had gone to Strathquoich against her better judgment, and really against Dominic's wish, implied though not openly expressed. From this her thoughts carried her to the house itself, and as its character and the style of her fellow-guests came more and more forcibly home to her, she felt covered with shame and confusion.

Then all these woes were merged and lost in the great and supreme agony of sickening uncertainty as to her husband's present condition.

Should she find him still alive? Awful thought, dead! while they were in a measure estranged, and without a chance of that sweet

interchange of forgiveness which should end all such quarrels. Or he might linger on for days, weeks, unconscious of her presence, in continuous suffering, till finally he passed away ; or, yet again, he might recover only to be a cripple, a maimed and wounded unfortunate for the rest of his natural life.

Torn and agitated beyond expression by these harrowing doubts, each alternately possessing her, and all alike awful to contemplate, Winnifred was a wreck of her former self when in the early morning they reached Euston Square.

Here a brougham met them, through the forethought of Bobby and Greatorex, who had been in telegraphic communication.

By eight o'clock Winnifred was in the sick room at The Farm.

She went straight to the sick room ; it was darkened but cool. A figure sat by the bedside, who rose as she entered, with fingers on lips and a faint 'hush' as he led her out of the room.

It was Guy Greatorex.

‘They sent for me directly, as you were away, and I did not feel certain you would come.’

She was too anxious and sore at heart to resent the reproach his words seemed to imply.

‘Be quick’ she cried hoarsely. ‘Tell me what it is, exactly what happened—the very worst.’

‘He must have lost his balance and fallen from the top of the ladder. He was painting on the highest part of the picture when I saw him, just before the accident. We parted’—should he tell her? No; it would only increase her anguish—‘only half an hour previous. When I got here in the evening I heard he had been found senseless on the floor.’

‘Ah!’ Winnifred put her hand to her heart.

‘He has concussion of the brain. He has been speechless and unconscious from the first. The doctors cannot say when the crisis will be past.’

‘Who was called in?’

‘The best men, of course—Paget and Gull. Johnson came, and Critchett, and Leibrecht——’

‘Critchett and Leibrecht? Why they? There is no fear, surely, of——’

‘Of his eyes? Alas! yes. That is the principal danger. He may they say—he probably will—escape with life, but he will lose his eyesight.’

‘Blind! God help us, this is the hardest blow of all.’

Winnifred recoiled even from the thought. Eyes, the first and chieftest of the gifts of God to the human frame—the loss of these to ordinary mortals is a sentence of life-long darkness not easy to endure. But to the painter, who before all men revels in the beauties of external nature, the harmonies of colour, the perfection of form, the burden must be far more grievous and difficult to bear. With his eyes must disappear for ever the power of production; his work was at an end. He could neither add to nor diminish

from the fame he had already achieved ; he could never more earn his bread.

‘ It is too terrible even in anticipation. But I will not surrender hope even to the last. Thank you, Mr. Greatorex. You were right to tell me the whole truth. Now let us return to his room.’

‘ You mean to rest first after your journey ? ’

‘ My place is by his bedside. It is my duty and my privilege, which I shall surrender to no one else.’

‘ You will surely not forbid me to remain ? ’

‘ Assuredly not, but nursing is woman’s work—a wife’s most of all.’

CHAPTER X.

WINNIFRED's woes had culminated in this great and terrible trial. Anguish of mind, embittered by the most poignant self-reproach, was her portion now for weeks and months to come. It was at first doubtful whether Dominic's life would be spared. The shock of the fall had been so severe, and the period of unconsciousness so long protracted, that recovery seemed quite beyond hope. Then followed delirium, in which he raved always of Winnifred, of his children, and his work; to which succeeded the calm of seemingly hopeless prostration, when the feeble spirit flickered like a light that is nearly spent.

But Dominic's native strength triumphed, and the grim shadow of death retreated, leaving only its sting behind. A terror, little

less agitating than the dread of death, now took possession of Winnifred's mind ; no new terror, but one which had hitherto been merged in the greater apprehension.

The painter was in darkness. He had lost his eyesight ; whether temporarily or for ever God alone knew, but for the present he was absolutely blind.

Dominic did not realise it at first. They kept it from him, of course. When he complained, in low feeble tones, of the darkness, when he asked again and again, each time with increasingly querulous insistence, that the blinds might be drawn back or the lamp lit, Winnifred, in a voice which but for her brave spirit her sobs would have choked, whispered that it was the doctor's order that he must lie quite still, and be patient only a little longer.

Sight ! God help him ! Would he ever again see the light of God's heaven, the colour of God's earth ? What heavier punishment could Providence have lain upon him had he been the veriest sinner ?

That he, her good, brave, and chivalrous husband should have been thus visited, seemed an inscrutable act of injustice, against which, in her soul, she rebelled.

How was she to tell him? Not yet, not yet; the blow would kill him. He must be spared the awful intelligence until he was strong enough to face it; and in the meantime she would bear the whole burden as best she might.

There were other burdens too. The sickening anxiety of the time when Dominic's life hung in the balance had thrown into the shade another serious trouble, which soon reasserted itself.

Ruin, as it seemed, stared them in the face. The breadwinner's hand was palsied: months, years, might elapse before he could earn a sixpence. If the worst supervened he might, like a maimed and crippled veteran, be for ever absolutely incapable of resuming work.

Meanwhile, money difficulties pressed them sore, and Winnifred hardly knew

which way to turn. The troubles of the spring had nearly cleared the studio of scraps and small studies, which always fetch money, and there was no other work on hand but the great picture to which Dominic had long devoted himself, wholly and entirely, to the exclusion of everything else.

To make matters worse, Christison began to show his teeth most disagreeably. Just when Winnifred was hard put to it to make both ends meet, the dealer came down to The Farm and betrayed himself in his true colours.

‘And where’s my picture?’ he asked, with almost brutal abruptness, as soon as he had enquired briefly after Mr. Gwynne’s health. ‘I’d like to see it.’

‘I don’t think you can well see it,’ Winnifred began.

‘Not a stroke done to it, I’ll lay a wager. Just where it was a year ago. That’s the way one’s swindled.’

‘Mr. Christison, you forget yourself. How dare you use such language to me?’

The cad was abashed rather by her bright, indignant eyes; but he had come there on purpose to bully, and he was not to be baulked of his prey.

‘I say it’s swindling to take a man’s money when you mean to make him no return. Your husband got fifteen hundred pounds out of me for just nothing at all. Do you think I can afford to lose a heap of money like that because an artist’s lazy and won’t work?’

‘You are mistaken. He has worked; he worked steadily on until—until—you surely know the reason why he ceased?’

‘Haccidents is haccidents, that I won’t deny,’ cried Christison, coarsely, ‘and they’ll happen in the best regulated families; but haccidents ain’t business, else why do people insure? I’m not insured against loss in this ‘ere picture, and I don’t choose to be robbed.’

‘You would have had the picture, without fail, on the date specified. You may have it still——’

‘Aye, but when? That’s what I want to know.’

‘It’s three parts finished, as you may see for yourself.’

‘That’s all I ask; but you take a man up so short, Mrs. Gwynne. I beg pardon if I’ve offended.’

Winnifred led the way to the studio. The picture stood upon the easel, just as on the day we saw it last, but with its face turned to the wall. Winnifred had been to see it the first moment she could spare from more pressing cares. The studio ladder was there too; the palette lying upon the floor; the brushes and mahl-stick lay scattered upon the ground. These Winnifred lifted tenderly and with streaming eyes, as one takes up the arms of a warrior stricken in the fight, and after kissing them again and again put them reverently away. Then, bitterly weeping, she called in assistance to move the easel round. It might never be wanted again.

Christison’s rude touch and brutal criticism was like desecration.

‘He ’ad got on with it, and no mistake. It ’ud a been as fine a thing as ever he done. Look at that light now. The two lights, real and artificial. I call it grand. It wants only one thing now.’

‘And that is ?’

‘The finishing touch ; and that it’ll never get, I’m much afraid.’

Winnifred shuddered.

‘Heaven grant you may be wrong ! But you will wait, surely ? Give us a little time —a month or two, more or less. We shall know the worst by then.’

‘A month or two ! Why, it’ll be sending-in time in another three months, and the picture’s promised then.’

‘Yes ; but——’

‘Look ’ere, Mrs. Gwynne, I ain’t a hard man—I ain’t, upon my soul ; but I’ve a partner who’s like nails, and he drives me always to the wall. He wouldn’t hear of it. He’ll break me, sell me up. He nagged at me ever since I advanced that money, and swears he’ll make me stump up myself. You wouldn’t have me lose it out and out ?’

‘Certainly not; nor need you. I only ask you to wait.’

‘I can’t do it,’ said Christison, buttoning up his coat with the air of a man who wished to resist temptation.

‘Do you mean that you insist on having the picture by the day?’

‘Or my money—that’s my last word.’

Then God help us! thought Winnifred to herself.

‘Business is business all the world over,’ he went on. ‘Sentiment ain’t nothing to say to it. Bargains struck must be stuck to. My money or my picture; one or the other, I must have up to time—at the appointed time.’

‘May I sell the picture elsewhere then?’

‘If you can. But who’ll buy what’s half-finished only, even by Dominic Gwynne? But you can try. Only I must have my money before the 1st April next, or—’

He did not complete the sentence; but Winnifred knew that he meant that he would sell them up, every stick, and force them to leave The Farm.

Misfortune upon misfortune ; and this last the most terrible, because it threatened exile, poverty, possibly want.

To whom could she turn now for assistance ? Her father was powerless to help her. They were abroad—the Forsyths, eking out their small income ; and Winnifred felt that the shattered remnants of their fortunes could by no possibility permit the advance of so large a sum as fifteen hundred pounds.

Would Mr. Greatorex come forward ? Possibly. But she could not bring herself to ask him. They had met sometimes when he called, as he did almost daily, to enquire, and exchanged a few words ; but there was no interchange of cordiality or friendship between them. Winnifred remembered that he had disliked her always, and in her last trial most of all. Greatorex, while he could not withhold a certain respect from her for her present patient devotion, doubted her still.

But might not some one buy the picture, even as it stood ? Surely some of Dominic's

friends at the club would help to find a purchaser ; some other dealer, or a collector, for whom the last work, alas ! of Dominic Gwynne would possess peculiar attractions. Then she shrank from seeking such help. They lived all of them by their art, and it was unfair to ask them to tout for her, to hand over the customers which they had secured for themselves.

Then, as a sudden inspiration, she remembered Lord Yellowborough.

But could she ask him ?

She had not seen or heard of him since that ludicrous scene at Strathquoich. Others, all her intimate friends, had written to express their sympathy. From him there had not been a single line. Why should he be offended ? Surely she was in no way to blame for what had occurred.

But Winnifred did not know the finale of the affair. No one had cared to obtrude upon her sorrow the ridiculous details of what followed after she had been driven away from the house. Burton had kept

his own counsel as to Winnifred's sudden departure and Lord Yellowborough's confinement in the library. No one else knew of the former; of the latter only Mrs. Stinger. She, on her return with the ladies for five o'clock tea, had drawn her own conclusions from the non-appearance of Winnifred and her swain. She merely hinted, with her usual broad interpretation of facts, that the missing couple were no doubt comfortable enough. Not been seen since the morning? Really. How very amusing! Perhaps they had gone off together. It was not until the evening drew on that she thought the time had arrived to release the captives. But that this might be done with sufficient *éclat* to compromise Winnifred for ever, Mrs. Stinger carried with her a troop of people to the library, promising them most excellent sport there.

Lord Yellowborough, however, as we know, was alone found. He was faint from want of food, altogether limp and pitiable; but in spite of his weakness, furiously en-

raged at the trick played upon him. He overwhelmed Mrs. Stinger with reproaches ; he abused Beau Burton in the plainest terms ; he would not have spared Winnifred had she appeared. Mrs. Stinger merely laughed at him ; the Beau said he was ready to go over to Belgium and give Lord Yellowborough every satisfaction for the affair. More, he took his lordship aside, and declared that he had acted solely to protect Mrs. Gwynne's good name ; that if his lordship permitted himself to insinuate a word against that lady, or to hint that she had been shut up in the library otherwise than by the purest accident, he, Major Septimus Burton, would horsewhip him, Lord Yellowborough, wherever he found him—even upon the steps of his club.

All of which tended to embitter Lord Yellowborough against Mrs. Gwynne.

Winnifred, however, unconscious of the peer's irritation, was resolved to appeal to him, and she wrote him a straightforward letter, explaining her difficulty, and asking him

whether, as a friend, he was disposed to buy her husband's picture, on the chance of its being completed on a later day.

There was so little mystery about this letter that it lay for a day or two on the hall table before it was despatched, and it was seen there by Guy Greatorex when he happened to call.

The reply came in due course. It was civil but formal. Lord Yellowborough only vaguely referred to the last occasion on which they had met, ' which is not perhaps engraved upon Mrs. Gwynne's memory indelibly as it is upon his ;' and he went on to say that as Mrs. Gwynne might, under present circumstances, find it inconvenient to receive him at The Farm, he hoped she would do him the honour to call at Yellowborough House, when the details of the purchase might be discussed and arranged.

If this was meant as a trap to compromise Winnifred, she did not fall into it. She wrote by return to say that, as a matter of business of such importance, she would be happy to

receive him whenever he might call—the sooner the better.

Lord Yellowborough replied suggesting a day.

Winnifred wrote again agreeing thereto.

All this Guy Greatorex, who was on the watch, magnified into a correspondence between the two.

Lord Yellowborough called, and was closeted with Winnifred in the studio for a couple of hours.

He had come there to upbraid. Although not keenly sensitive to ridicule, he was still sore at heart at the trick played upon him. But Winnifred's grief disarmed him. The bitter words died away upon his tongue. He could only think that he was again in the presence of a woman whom to the full extent of his selfish temperament he passionately loved.

Had not her reserved and quiet manner restrained him, he would have passed at once beyond all bounds. He sought to take her hand and kiss it.

‘You would not presume, I trust, upon the indiscretion I have committed in asking you to help us,’ she said.

‘What indiscretion can there be? May not friends appeal to each other?’

‘Nothing but the pressure of the very heaviest needs would have induced me to take this step. But the picture must be sold, or we shall not be able to pay our way.’

‘It is sold already—to me—at your own price.’

‘Oh, Lord Yellowborough, how can I thank you sufficiently?’

‘I am the gainer. I will buy the picture gladly, but upon one condition.’

‘A condition?’

‘Yes—that you finish it yourself.’

Winnifred doubted whether he was in earnest.

‘I should not dare to touch it. It would be sacrilege, and I should ruin it.’

‘That’s my affair. I shall be content to take it as it comes from your hands, on those terms. But I am firm as to conditions.’

What could Winnifred say? In the end she accepted gratefully, and promised to do her best. The price fixed was that arranged with Christison—the cheque to be forthcoming whenever required. 'And I may come sometimes to see how you progress?'

'Whenever you please, Lord Yellowborough. I shall value your advice and follow it.'

It was with a light heart that she rejoined Dominic after this lengthy interview. Guy Greatorex was sitting with him. Long before this the temporary estrangement between them had been forgotten. Guy, as he rose to bow and shake hands, looked at Winnifred enquiringly. His face was dark and lowering, full of suspicious misgivings. His manner implied that he knew who had been her visitor. But he did not question her. Why should he? Nor did Winnifred mention that Lord Yellowborough had called. Dominic was too feeble still to be interested in such matters, and it was no part of Mr. Greatorex's business to be informed. But as she simply

kissed her husband's thin white hands as they lay upon the coverlet, deftly smoothed his pillows, and asked in a low tone if he were comfortable, Greatorex almost cursed her for what he deemed was her cold-blooded heartless duplicity. A woman who could receive a lover and return next minute to the bedside of her helpless husband, was indeed lost to all sense of shame. He determined to watch her more closely than ever. He did so, and all tended to confirm his worst suspicions. Yellowborough came repeatedly to the house. He was nearly always admitted, and he generally stayed some time. Winnifred never spoke of his visits even to her husband. This Greatorex discovered for himself by enquiring of Dominic, who, with returning strength was regaining interest in the outside world, whether anything had been heard of Yellowborough. The answer was in the negative always. Yellowborough was probably abroad, Dominic said. He might stay there for all he (Dominic) cared. Yet the man was again and again in the

house! Dominic must be undeceived. It was wicked and unfriendly to leave him still in the dark. Only when and how to tell him? He was, although convalescent, still far from strong. A shock of painful intelligence might cause a relapse, and the doctors had said there would be no hope of saving the eyes if any anxieties or acute mental worries supervened.

But no such scruples determined him from giving Winnifred a bit of his mind. And to her Greatorex resolved to speak pretty plainly, delicate and difficult though the task might be.

Winnifred fired up hotly at once, even at the merest hint. But she spoke in a low voice; they were in a room adjoining Dominic's sick room. He was asleep.

'I have yet to learn that you have any right to take me to task. It is an impertinence even to broach the subject to me.'

'I have felt it my duty to speak. If you will not listen to me, I must inform Dominic, and——'

‘That would be like you! You would sacrifice him to a petty spirit of malevolence and backbiting. Mr. Greatorex, you ought to have been an old woman.’

‘The subject is too solemn to be disposed of in such *persiflage*. I cannot express the pain it has been to me to witness what has been passing under this roof. I have allowed it to pass unnoticed so far, but with the keenest anguish; but it would be criminal on my part to continue silent. Lord Yellowborough’s repeated visits to this house while your husband lies there——’

‘You would not dare to speak thus if he were able to take my part!’

‘It is an outrage against which, I, as his oldest friend, must and will protest even with my dying breath. Lord Yellowborough’s visits must cease, or I must tell Dominic all.’

There was a movement in the next room as though Dominic was awake. Could he have heard? Winnifred looked in, but he seemed still sleeping. Then she returned to Greatorex, and without again speaking, rang the bell.

‘I must ask you to leave the house.’

It was the second time he had been expelled.

‘I shall not leave until——’

‘I am mistress here still. I insist, or my servants shall——’

She followed him into the hall.

‘I scorn to justify myself. I will not attempt to speak a word in my own defence. Yours, as you will some day understand, is the outrage, not mine. Pray God, you may never cross my path again !’

Dominic had heard a portion of their conversation—a word here and a word there ; none of them sufficient to supply damning proof, yet all—taken in conjunction—calculated to disturb a mind unhinged.

His condition by this time had ceased to be critical, but he was still unequal to any severe strain, and this new anxiety threatened to unman him completely. Had he been himself, he might have put all doubts away from him, and inviting Winnifred’s confidence by the proof of his own unshaken trust in her,

have asked and obtained an explanation which would at once have comforted and reassured him. But there are reasons when we shrink from a plain and straightforward course in dealing with our mental woes. It is so, especially when recent illness has left us weak and invertebrate, and we have neither strength nor courage to look them boldly in the face. Five words to Winnifred would have restored perfect confidence between them. Dominic shrank from the possible *dénouement* that might precipitate a crisis, and still hiding his sorrow, it ate, like a concealed sore, yet deeper and deeper into his heart.

The doctors were fairly puzzled. Their patient made no further progress towards convalescence. If anything he retrograded. There was no recuperative energy in him. His general symptoms were thoroughly unsatisfactory, and, worst of all, the weakness of the eyes increased from day to day.

Was there anything on his mind? the doctors asked Winnifred; any pressure of

secret trouble—money anxieties, professional worries, or what? Winnifred could not say. She sounded Dominic, but could not find that he fretted about his affairs. He did not seem to remember the promise to Christison ; he never once spoke of the Vision of Sin. What else could be upon his mind ?

That which really oppressed him never occurred to her. Firm in the consciousness of her own rectitude, she never, for one moment, imagined that he was full of doubts of her, but dared not question her or call her to account.

Then the doctors insisted upon a complete change of treatment. Dominic must have rest, thorough, unbroken rest, with constant change of scene. They had better travel abroad for some months—a year, if necessary—moving constantly from place to place, choosing pleasant spots always, where the climate was balmy and the skies serene.

‘Would Dominic like it?’

‘You will go with me? You will be always at my side? You will never leave

me?' he asked in a whisper, as eagerly as his weakness would allow.

'Leave you, darling! Is it likely? Never; nothing shall part us in this world, nor, I trust, in the next.'

He clung to her, took her hands in his, and covered them with kisses, which she returned upon his wan and wasted cheek. 'You have not ceased to love me, Winnifred?'

'No, indeed.'

'And no one shares your heart? I have no rivals, Lord Yellow——'

She smiled, then laughed aloud, as she put her hands upon his lips.

'Is this, then, what has vexed and worried you so of late; this the weighty secret which has oppressed you? You were jealous, Dominic; you, whom I thought trusted me with your whole heart? No, my husband—never yet have I forgotten the respect due to you and to myself as your wife.'

'It was Greatorex. Lord Yellowborough has been here, and you never mentioned it.
—I—'

‘Dominic, Lord Yellowborough has proved himself a true friend, as you will yourself acknowledge when you know all.’

And she told him.

‘My brave wife ! and you have finished it—yourself. Where is the picture ? May I see it ? Let’s go at once. This bandage—surely I may remove it ?’

‘No, no ; not yet. You do not know the risk you run. Your eyes are still weak. If you are not careful now the consequences may be terrible.’

‘My eyes—are they in danger ? I never guessed it. God help me ! Blind !’ He buried his head in his hands. ‘The Lord’s will be done.’

They went South by easy stages by Paris to Strasbourg, and so to Aix and Chambery, then by the rail across the Mont Cenis to Turin. They paused here, and again at Milan, but pushed on then to Venice, where Dominic found himself among old friends.

Here Dominic began distinctly to mend. They occupied his old lodgings upon the

Grand Canal, and they spent their days upon the broad lagoon, with Pietro, the gondolier, who was full of respectful but hearty sympathy. They visited the scenes both knew so well: that behind the Fondamenta Nuova, where there was a raft of timber still, like that on which their first acquaintance had begun. Winnifred explained and described fully all she saw, for Dominic still wore a shade and bandage, which in the broad daylight was not to be removed.

From Venice they retraced their steps to Verona, thence to the Lake of Garda, where they lingered among the sleepy old-world villages, with thier vast lemon groves upon the western shores. Quiet, little known Iseo, they visited, and Como the fashionable, already crowded and gay with early tourists, pausing nowhere till they reached Maggiore, so full of tender and exciting memories of the spring-time of their loves.

At the Grand Hotel, Pallanza, Mr. Seychab received them like old friends. Other old friends were there too—Colonel

Forsyth and Lady Clementina, who had spent the winter here.

Both were much changed. Colonel Forsyth had the air of a faded beau ; he was unkempt, querulous, and full of complaints. Lady Clementina was even worse. She had aged considerably, and had become hypochondriacal. She was perpetually vexed about her digestion. She bored the inn-keepers here, as she had everywhere else, about her diet. 'No mutton ? I can eat nothing but mutton. Not veal, on any account.' It was the same about bread. The bread must be stale—two days old at least. When she was travelling she was in the habit of concealing a couple of rolls, which she produced from her bag at the next place at which they stayed. She was full of whims and fancies. She could not go to the railway station in a 'bus ; she must have a carriage. If there were none she made people's lives miserable by opening and shutting windows and shrieking at every jolt. She was disposed to cry at every mishap—a sort of

infantile whimper—which rose into hysterics when she was thwarted ; as when they made a party to cross the lake, and she declared nothing would induce her to trust her life in an open boat. ‘ I’ve heard they’re so dangerous ; and there’s a cloud over Monterone. We shall have a hurricane, and shall be swamped.’

Colonel Forsyth in former times would have chastised her with his tongue. But he was too broken and dejected in spirit nowadays. He merely shook his head contemptuously and bade people take no notice of her. They were fits of temper—no more. ‘ If you take notice, she’ll be worse.’

All this was inexpressibly painful to Winifred. She was resolved in her heart that if good days ever returned to them she would heap coals of fire upon her father’s head ; restore him to something like comfort once more, and enable him to return to his old haunts and friends.

Nor was the hope of returning prosperity altogether vague and illusory. Dominic had

continued to improve steadily. To move hand in hand with Winnifred through the scenes consecrated by their early lovers' quarrels and reconciliations, to sit beneath the same wide-spreading chestnut trees, near the Church of Santa Maria du Campo; to paddle across to the islands dei Piscatori and Isola Bella, and be reminded at every step of the old happy days, brought him hourly fresh strength.

The shade and bandage were already gone. He could now look out for himself upon the fair world through goggle green spectacles, and need not fear that they also, with their greenish-hued medium, might also be discarded.

Perfect harmony existed between him and Winnifred. It was like a second honeymoon, sweetened by closer intimacy, and the consciousness of differences ended in a renewed and more perfect understanding.

At length came the last days of their sojourn at Baveno. The time was approaching when Dominic should gird up his loins

and return to the fight strengthened and restored to perfect health, with a world of latent vigour stored up in him while he was lying fallow and out of work.

They were seated, Winnifred and he, up above the lake-shore looking across towards Laveno. The sun was going down, and the end approaching of what had been a perfect day, in that early summer season, before the heat becomes unbearable and there is no sting in the sky. Everything was beautiful and dream-like. In front of them a gourd twined up around its lattice-work, and its broad green leaves were flecked dark against the opalescent sky. There were willows with ash-grey foliage, standing singly at wide intervals upon the margin of silver shingle which fringes the lake. Through the tree-stems the waters glittered in many-shifting hues—soft greys, pale blues, and tender mother-of-pearl. Here a dark shadow crossed the lake, and in it the Borromean Islands stood out strong and black, the cypresses of the Isola Madre being clearly

defined against the pink mountains behind, which were flushed by the last glow of sunset. Pallanza, opposite, was also in bright light ; the Grand Hotel flaunting its white stucco as unblushingly as a coquette her cosmetics ; high above in the blue vault evening clouds gathered massively, tinged with pink, and piled layer above layer.

It was Sunday evening. The village folk were all in their gala dress. Some few among the maidens, aping the fashions of the great world, wore white frocks, with *paniers*, and had their hair dressed in the fashion of two years back ; their mothers and less ambitious friends were satisfied with a bright purple or maroon skirt and a gay kerchief on their heads. Great hulking hobbledehoys lounged about in their best brown suits, carrying sticks or a bright-coloured umbrella. They were idling, waiting for the local band, which was already collecting, to begin, except where here and there under a *pergola* a party was engaged upon the favourite game of bowls.

But there was some movement in the main street. It is the highway, the straight road from Domo d'Ossola and the Simplon pass. The bells of an approaching *vetturino* tinkled as it plodded steadily along towards Stresa ; then other vehicles bound to Arona and the line for Turin. Next came a quiet cavalcade—a couple of vans, painted the one a bright green, the other a vivid yellow, preceded by a donkey-cart, which the proprietor drives. On this were signs unmistakable of his calling. The big drum was strapped on behind, above it a hatbox, a red umbrella, and a box of properties, including the materials for an awning and stage. A halt was called. In a twinkling everything was unpacked ; the chief personage donned his hat and spangled attire, and mounted the platform his attendants had erected, whence he proclaimed the infallible qualities of the nostrums he wished to sell. The whole village began to collect at once : children of an age who should have gone to bed ; boatmen who had drawn up their boats

and left them ; the patrons of the *cafés* and *osterias* stood in a crowded tangle around the quack doctor ; when, with a crack ! crack ! like a salvo of pistol-shots, the rumbling clatter of heavy wheels, and a running accompaniment of bells and trotting hoofs, the evening diligence dashed in among the throng and scattered it right and left.

Both Winnifred and Dominic had been watching the scene with amusement, and when the diligence arrived scanned its occupants, as one does in distant parts, in search of a familiar face. One there was which both well knew—old Guy Greatorex—who jumped at once from the *banquette* and came to them with outstretched hands.

‘ I heard you were here,’ he said, with deep emotion in his voice, ‘ and I came straight from England to express my deep regrets to Mrs. Gwynne. I now know the whole truth, and apologise humbly for the deep injustice I did you.’

THE END.

Spottiswoode & Co., Printers, New-street Square, London.

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